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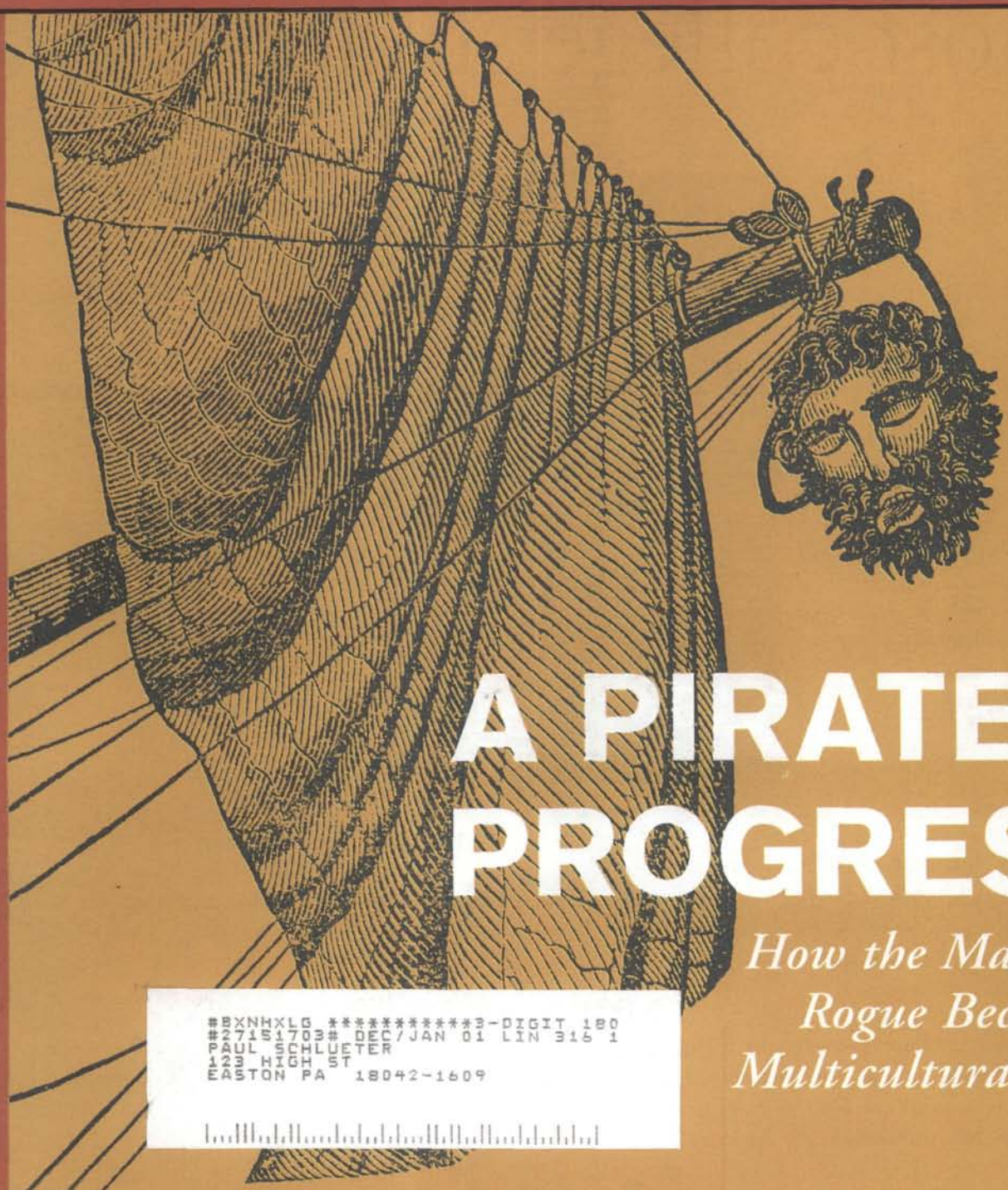

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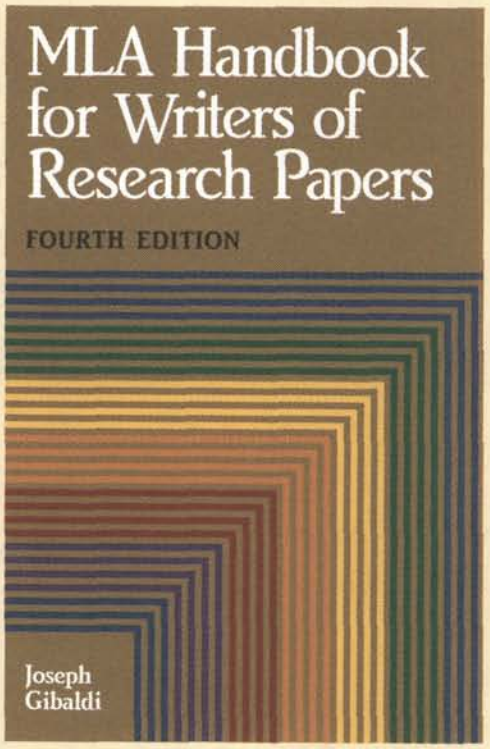

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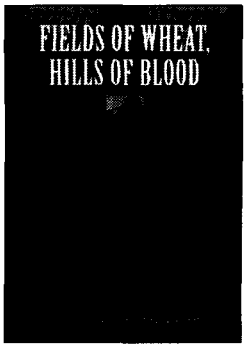

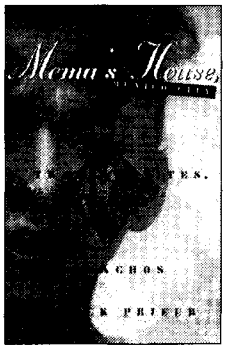

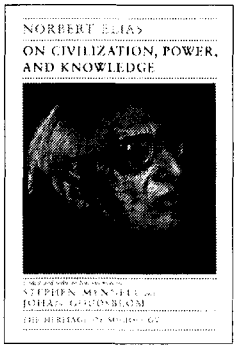

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A SEASONAL BOOK REVIEW FROM THE EDITORS OF LINGUA FRANCA, LAUNCHING THIS SPRING.

THE LINGUA FRANCA

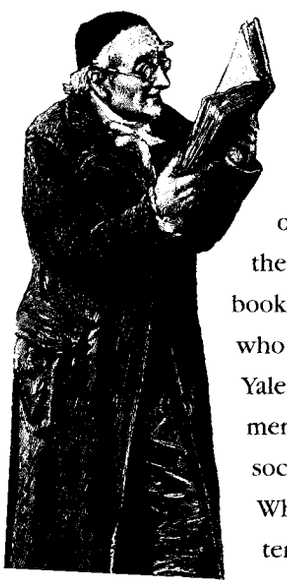
BOOK REVIEW

SPRING 1998

Seeing Like a State

BY JAMES C. SCOTT, YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS

REVIEWED BY ROBERT HEILBRONER



JAMES SCOTT HAS WRITTEN A POWERFUL, and in many ways insightful, explanation as to why grandiose programs of social reform, not to mention revolution, so often end in tragedy—the Soviet disaster being the textbook case. Yet *Seeing Like a State* is not another book preaching opposition to large-scale social change. Scott, who is a professor of political science and anthropology at Yale, has written sympathetically of peasant resistance movements in Southeast Asia, and he is fully aware that large-scale social change often requires bold governmental leadership. Why, then, the cautionary 'in many ways' of my first sentence? The answer lies in Scott's title. To see like a state [illegible] of far-sightedness. On the one hand it is to

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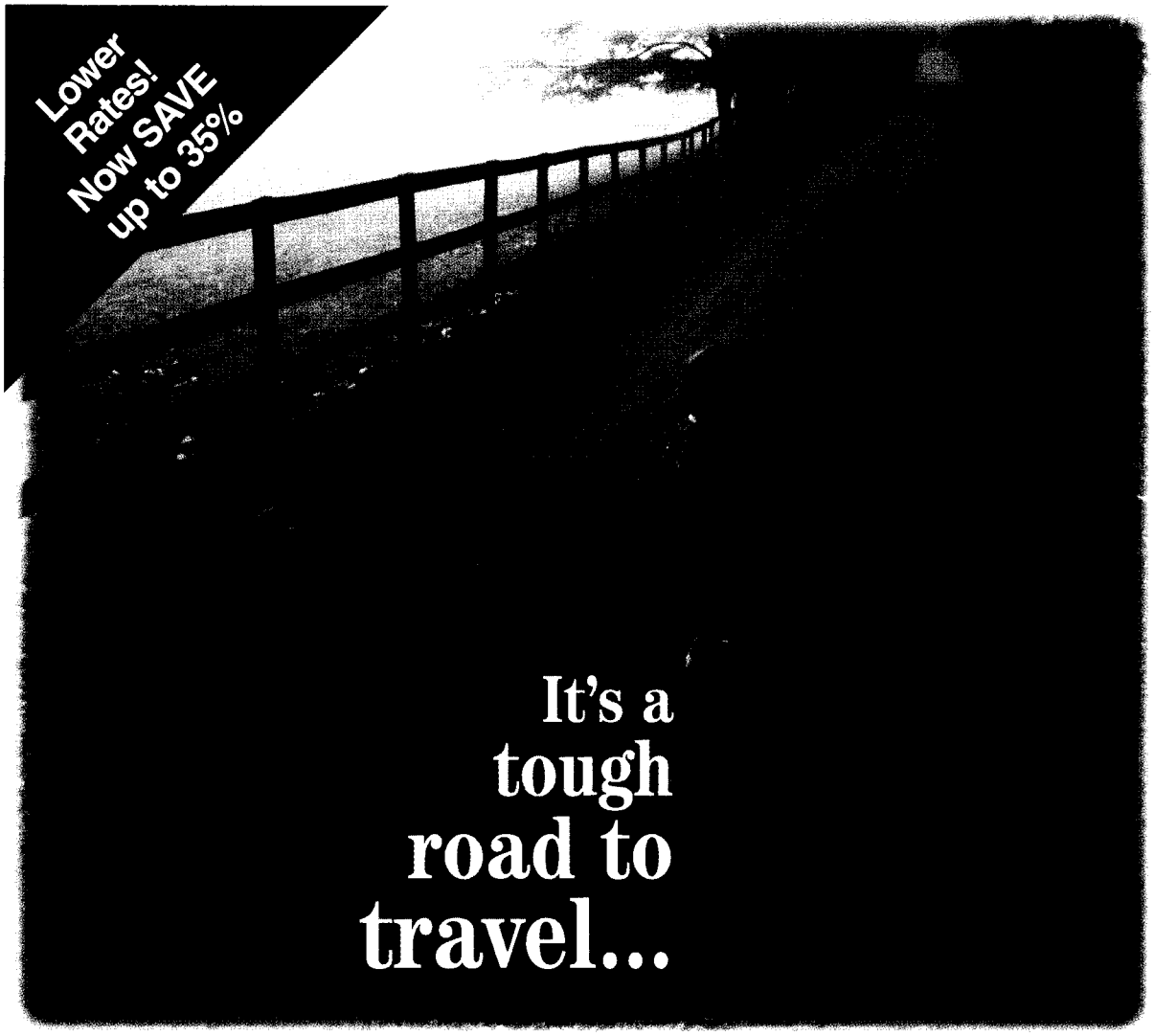

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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TRADING PLACES

As one of the three hundred economists who signed the open letter to President Clinton in support of NAFTA, I feel compelled to clarify several points made in Eyal Press's article, "The Free Trade Faith" [December/January].

First, many economists who support the expansion of international trade also recognize that certain frictions and rigidities will prevent economies from rapidly adjusting to changing fortunes. The isolated economist, enamored with his theoretical models and ignorant of the real world, is a hackneyed caricature.

More importantly, no properly trained international economist claims that free trade is an unmitigated good so much as that a freer trade regime is better than a more protectionist one. Trade creates winners and losers, but if the losers are compensated, everyone can potentially benefit. True, this compensation is rarely politically or practically viable. Should we therefore halt international trade?

Finally, Press neglects to mention a key trend in globalization: the rapid increase in two-way flows of financial capital. This phenomenon has far more to do with the reduction in real wages in Mexico than NAFTA does. It is also likely that the mobility of capital will prove more critical to the evolution of the East Asian currency crisis than the degree of economic integration encouraged by international trade.

MENZIE CHINN
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT SANTA CRUZ

Readers of "The Free Trade Faith" may be left with the false impression that the central political debate over trade concerns whether or not "America can compete." But there are really *two* different political debates. One is over whether "free" or "strategic" trade better serves America's national self-interest. Proponents of strategic trade policy, like Ross Perot and Clyde Prestowitz, think that government intervention will enhance the success of U.S.-based corporations. The other debate centers on the question of whether free trade is undermining social and environmental standards in *all* countries. This is the fear of Ralph Nader as well as the labor and environmental organizations that coalesced to oppose NAFTA and the recent extension of fast-track negotiating authority.

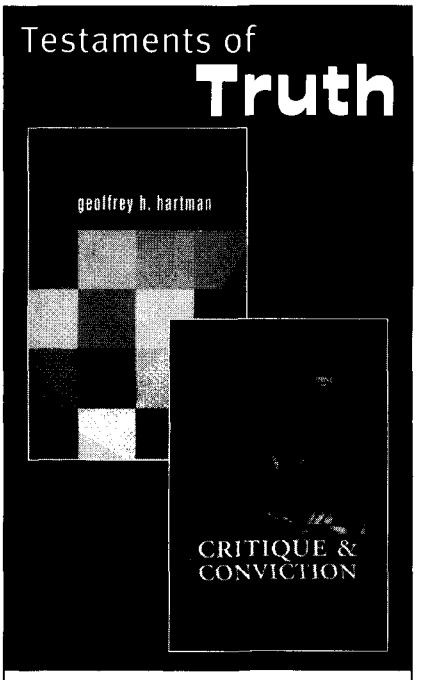
Unfortunately, the distinction between these debates has been blurred by the willingness of the strategic traders and the supporters of social standards to unite against their common enemy. This is a tactical error for progressives, since it allows the trade establishment to choose the terms of the debate—as the Clinton administration did when it selected Perot as the "official" spokesperson for the opposition. Like Press, journalists and the general public then interpret all dissent on trade within a nationalist discourse.

Although we are caught in the vise grip of competitiveness, a turn to protectionism and national insularity is not the answer. The world is becoming more tightly knit, and the crucial problems, from global warming to mass poverty, are international in scope. Forward-looking critics of neoclassical trade theory are not trying to promote U.S. industry at the expense of the rest of the world. They are searching for ways to tame markets so that global collective action can prosper.

PETER DORMAN
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL ECONOMY MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Eyal Press responds: Menzie Chinn is free to think the isolated economist is a "hackneyed caricature." It's a caricature that Robert Heilbroner, Dani Rodrik, and many other economists say they have encountered in real life. As for trade having winners and losers, my article made this perfectly clear, explicitly iden-

continued on page 65



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Field *Notes*

HABEAS CORPUS

INVENTOR, NEOLOGIST, inveterate planner and schemer, the English political philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) racked up any number of firsts during his lifetime. Strictly speaking, he was not the first person to embrace utilitarianism—the philosophy with which he is usually credited. But he coined the words "international" and "prepran-dial" and dreamed up the panopticon, the high-surveillance prison that Michel Foucault would later make famous as an expression of the sinister coercive power of the modern state.

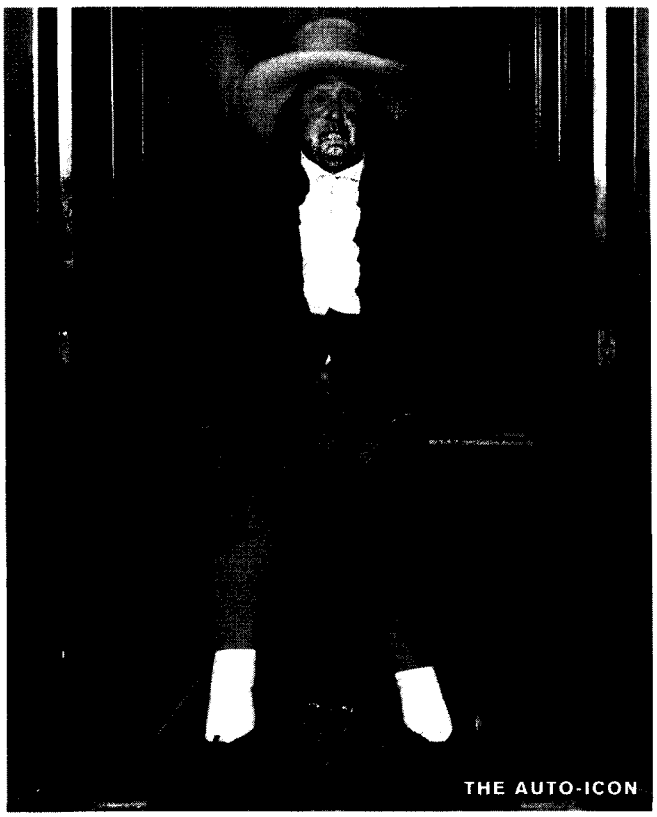
Bentham also devised an interest-bearing currency (he called it "circulating annuities"), an underground icebox (the Frigidarium), and a system for long-distance communication (the "conversation tube"), which, despite the limited technology of his day, neatly presaged the telephone. More than one hundred years before Brigitte Bardot was born, Bentham devoted an entire section of his model penal code to cruelty to animals. And according to Philip Schofield, a scholar at University College, London, Bentham may well have been the world's first jogger—an activity he referred to with characteristic exactitude as "circumgyration."

This winter Bentham may add another first to his list when he becomes the first human being to attend his 250th birthday party. Two dozen scholars are marking the occasion with a conference at the University of Texas. And thanks to a live video hookup connecting the revelers in Austin with the philosopher's residence in London, Bentham—what's left of him—will be at the party, too.

It sounds like a lurid publicity stunt, but it's nothing less than what the eccentric Brit intended. As a utilitarian, Bentham believed in promoting the greatest good for the greatest number with the least amount of pain. Accordingly, he left instructions in his will for the preservation of his corpse so that humankind might "reap some small benefit by my disease" and—more to the point—so that his followers might take inspiration from his continued presence in their midst. Today, Bentham's "Auto-Icon" (his skeleton minus the head, for which a more palatable wax replica has been substituted) resides fully dressed inside a glass box at University College, London.

What more efficient way to represent oneself to posterity than to serve as one's own memorial? (Was he also the first performance artist?) It probably never occurred to Bentham, however, that his final act might someday have more than one meaning. No longer just a poster boy for the movement—efficiency embodied—the Auto-Icon has become a particularly apt symbol of utilitarianism's ambiguous status today: a much loved, much despised theory that, depending on whom you ask, has either outlived its uses or is just now coming into its own. As UC-Berkeley law school professor and conference participant David Lieberman puts it: "Utilitarianism has long been out of favor in academic jurisprudence and moral philosophy. But, paradoxically, it's more than ever before at the center of government decision making."

In the nineteenth century, utilitarianism was a driving political force. Bentham peddled his blueprint for a democratic constitution to countries all over the world—the Portuguese nearly adopted it—and his disciples briefly had their own party, the Philosophic Radicals, in the House of Commons. In this country, however, Bentham had less luck. When he wrote to the White House in 1811 to propose that the Americans try out his civil and penal codes, James Madison gave the Brit the cold shoulder. No doubt the utilitarian's scorn for both the doctrine of natural rights—good revolution, bad foundations, was Bentham's take on the War for Independence—and the separation of powers struck the author of *The*



THE AUTO-ICON

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

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Federalist Papers as misplaced.

Now, however, Benthamism is back in style, albeit in a new, high-tech guise. Rational-choice theorists, number crunchers, cost-benefit analysts: These are the utilitarians of the 1990s. And though Bentham would hardly recognize his ideas in the policy wonks' computer algorithms, the goal is still very much the same—calculating utility preferences.

"Utilitarianism fits in very nicely with our highly technologized age," says Jean Bethke Elshtain, a professor of social and political ethics at the University of Chicago and a speaker at the Bentham conference. "Because we can quantify in such sophisticated ways, we assume we can apply econometrics to everything—family, work, love." David Lieberman agrees. "Bentham is the perfect icon for what modern society has become," he observes. "Aggressively materialistic, aggressively technocratic, aggressively hedonic."

But just because Benthamism is Us doesn't mean the professors necessarily approve. "Bentham's claim was that there was a first principle that should guide all public policy: the greatest happiness," says James Fishkin, a professor of political philosophy at UT, who is directing the conference. "But now we see all kinds of problems with that notion: What about the interests of the few? The minority? The vulnerable? We want to tell him what he got right and what he got wrong."

To that end, Fishkin is asking some of his panelists to address their remarks directly to Bentham's video presence. And if the results of our informal survey are any indication, the skeleton may be in for a rough ride. Chicago's Elshtain,

Bentham's "Auto-Icon" resides fully dressed inside a glass box in London.

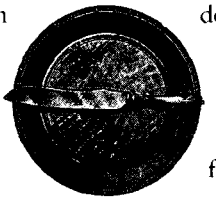
for example, will deliver a paper titled "Bentham Stuffed"—an allusion, she explains, not just to her subject's physical state but to her sense of utilitarianism's "conceptual poverty" as a philosophy of human life. More sympathetic but still critical, UT philosopher David Braybrooke will ponder "Bentham's Master Idea: Could It Have Turned Out More Happily?" "Bentham was his own worst enemy," Braybrooke argues. "His master idea was that social policy should be chosen according to statistical evidence of its impact. Unfortunately, as soon as he got this idea, he came up with the 'felicific calculus' of pleasure and pain. And this concept has driven out of sight other ways of collecting statistical evidence." Even UT's James Galbraith, one of the few economists planning to attend the conference, says he has serious reservations about utilitarian-inspired economic theory today. "The whole field of welfare economics is in dire straits," he says. "We can't escape the necessity of evaluating social conditions, but there must be ways forward that bypass the utilitarian approach."

Still, no matter how nasty things get, Bentham is expected to remain a perfect gentleman throughout the ordeal. And he will be richly rewarded for his stoicism. Fishkin is planning to surprise the birthday boy with an elaborately decorated cake—a meticulous replica of Bentham's beloved panopticon.

EMILY EAKIN

POLITE SOCIETY

"WHATEVER HAPPENED TO Good Manners?" wondered the editors of *U.S. News & World Report* in a recent cover story. These days, as champion athletes snack on each other's ears, bemoaning the collapse of civility has become a bipartisan cottage industry. Conservative pundit George F. Will laments the "coarsening of America"; in his new book, *The Triumph of Meanness,* leftist critic Nicolaus Mills denounces "a new savagery" afoot in the land. In *Civility,* slated for publication in May, Yale law professor Stephen L. Carter deplores the current "crisis" in American manners and morals; in *The Argument Culture,* another shortly forthcoming book, Georgetown professor Deborah Tannen decries "our culture of unrelenting contention." Even members of the U.S. House of Representatives, perhaps the ultimate hotbed of discourtesy, are confessing to rampant intemperateness and vowing to mend their ways. Last March, 224 congressmen attended a Civility Retreat in Hershey, Pennsylvania, where they were instructed to be more flexible and deliberative.



Into this slough of despond wades a mild-mannered Italian expatriate with an uplifting message: All is not lost in America. Pier Massimo Forni, professor of Italian at Johns Hopkins University, has spent much of the past five years pursuing what he describes as an ardent "side interest" in the sociology of civility and politeness. He has scoured etiquette guidebooks, convened blue-ribbon panels, haunted the hallways of local high schools and hospitals—all in an attempt, he says, to "give some intellectual mooring" to news accounts of mounting rudeness. But his years in the civility trenches, Forni says, have led him to an unusual conclusion: These calamitous accounts, far from

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mirroring reality, reflect instead a "phenomenon of public misunderstanding."

To hear Forni tell it, America is experiencing something of a Manners Renaissance. True, he says, some of the traditional forms of deference and etiquette have been swept aside—but if we understand manners in the right way, we'll understand that new, equally worthy forms have sprung up to take their place. Asked for examples of this new-style politesse, Forni cites a burgeoning environmental awareness among Generation Xers. Ten years ago, he says, college students would guzzle Cokes, then simply throw their empty cans on the grass. Now, even the most apathetic teen makes a point of toting her aluminum to the nearest trash can—or better yet, recycling bin. "Consciousness about ecology," Forni says, "has become part of the good, civilized person."

Forni's colleague Giulia Sissa, a classics professor with a background in anthropology, is helping Forni coordinate his research. She, too, is sanguine about the state of manners in contemporary culture. Far from mourning the coarsening of America, Sissa detects a "softening of America"—a national outbreak of mutual respect and civility, as embodied in the much-maligned Antioch rules regulating sex play on college campuses. "The Antioch rules are grounded in an aristocratic and bourgeois code of behavior, which is that a true gentleman will never go beyond a 'No,'" Sissa enthuses. "I would not call this an absurd and persecuting way of intruding into private life."

To ponder these and other questions, Forni and Sissa have organized the Hopkins Civility Project, a marshaling of resources for what they hope

will be an ongoing study of courtesy, civility, and etiquette in America. The project is part buzz session, part missionary pilgrimage. With the help of a $6,000 grant from the Maryland Humanities Council, Forni has conducted colloquies on civility at inner-city high schools, hospitals, even a local prison. He has taught an undergraduate course on the history of manners and politeness. ("It's not a course on etiquette," Forni says. "Students don't learn what fork to use when they eat their salad.") He has assembled a low-tech civility archive, three shelves of color-tabbed folders of clippings on the state of manners in America. The folders bear such eclectic subject headings as TABLE MANNERS/MORALITY; LEAF BLOWERS/CALIFORNIA; KATHA POLLITT. Some are even less scrutable: PEDAGOGY/AGAINST; PEDAGOGY/AGAINST-AGAINST. "There are those who argue against civility in pedagogy," Professor Forni briskly explains. "Then there are those who argue against those who argue against civility."

The project will culminate this March with a three-day international symposium on civility. Titled "Reassessing Civility: Forms and Values at the Turn of the Century," the symposium will feature middle- and highbrow avatars of decorum, from syndicated columnist Judith Martin—popularly known as Miss Manners—to the French anthropologist Marc Augé, whose presentation will be called "Identity, Alterity, Civility." There is giddy talk of a trade journal, town meetings, a statistical survey of social conventions across cultures.

Over lunch at Johns Hopkins's swank faculty club, Forni acknowledges that his and Sissa's undertaking has drawn ire from several of their colleagues, who regard manners and politeness as the oppressive tools of a bourgeois culture. "There are those who say that these terms have outlived their historical usefulness," admits Forni. But when he talks about manners, of course, it is not in the Edith Wharton sense of a pinky-in-the-air atmosphere of faint implications and pale delicacies. Forni has a more robust definition of civility, which he links to the Latin word *civitas*: "doing the right thing in and for the collectivity." Forni's definition of good manners? "A habit of concern for the welfare and for the well-being of individ-

To hear Forni tell it, America is experiencing something of a Manners Renaissance.

uals, for the planet, and for the global village." Indeed, far from dispensing virtues to the citizenry, Forni seeks to recast the very notion of civility in new, progressive terms. One benchmark of progress on the civility front, for instance, is the emergence of what he calls a "culture of concern": concern for the disadvantaged, concern for women, concern for the welfare of historically oppressed minorities.

These may all be welcome developments, but are they best understood as changes in manners? For one, many of the trends hailed by Forni and Sissa as harbingers of a new politeness—heightened gender sensitivity, accommodation of the disabled, and so on—are often motivated by legal necessity as well as by a spontaneous upsurge of considerateness and fellow feeling. The professor replies: "I do not delude myself that acts of politeness are always spontaneous. They can be the result of rules and regulations. But the sensitivity had to be there to create the rules! So it's difficult, sometimes, to decide which came first."

But such a dilemma is far from the only quandary posed by this complex new field. During our lunch, Forni politely looks the other way as I tussle with my cold poached salmon. A large chunk of the grayish, rock-hard fillet flakes off and onto the floor. I want to crawl under the table; but Forni knows just what to do. "I think you should send it back," he declares in his charmingly accented English. "Why don't you order something else? I don't think this is edible."

After the catch of the day has been whisked away and replaced by a tasty lobster salad, I ask Forni to explain the cultural subtext underlying such an insouciant act. In rescuing me from the noxious dish, I suggested, perhaps he was honoring an ancient code of gallantry toward luncheon guests in distress.

Forni throws back his head and laughs. "I sent back your salmon," he says, "because it had the consistency of a hockey puck." And with that, Pier Forni proceeds to tuck into a delicious-looking shrimp Caesar salad. He uses the correct fork.

RUTH SHALIT

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CHESS FOR SUCCESS

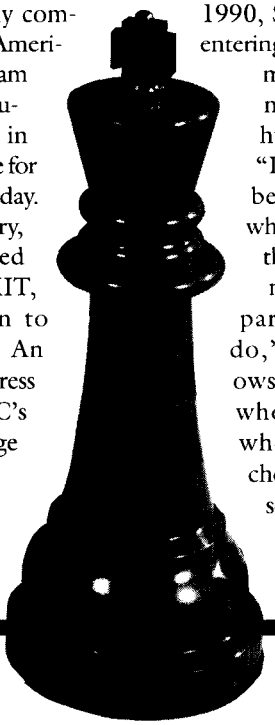
FOR TWENTY YEARS, THE UNIversity of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) was a safety school for average students seeking modest tuition and modest academic challenges. Then, about ten years ago, the school decided to overhaul its image and carve out a niche as a public "honors" university, a place for smart kids who either couldn't (or wouldn't) shell out a fortune for a name-brand school. But what could UMBC—an institution that lacks even a strong athletic program—offer to entice straight-A students also being wooed by the Ivies and top public universities?

The answer: chess. It may be a cliché, but some of the brainiest high school students in the country (and in the world, for that matter) are also aspiring grand masters. So in 1991 UMBC set out to build a powerhouse chess team, one player at a time. By 1996 UMBC's newly minted Dream Team was talented enough to capture first place in the intensely competitive annual Pan American Intercollegiate Team Championship—a grueling four-day event in which players compete for up to twelve hours a day. Along the way to victory, UMBC players forced competitors from MIT, Harvard, and Penn to concede matches. An avalanche of positive press followed, and UMBC's image began to change significantly.

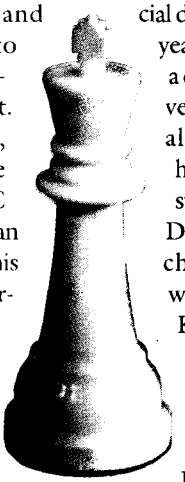
"The rise of the UMBC chess team reflects the rise of the university," boasts Alan Sherman, an associate professor of computer science who serves as chess team director. "Chess has given UMBC a unique identity," he says. "What other school values chess more than football? At how many schools can you find chess team players proudly walking around campus wearing colorful chess team jackets and distributing chess team schedule cards?"

> "What other school values chess more than football?"

Where else, indeed? For UMBC president Freeman Hrabowski, chess is a clever gambit to attract unabashedly brainy types to campus. Chess is the most visible of several "intellectual sports," which also include a Quiz Bowl, a model United Nations, and a debate team. The strategy seems to be working. Since 1990, SAT scores for entering UMBC freshmen have risen more than one hundred points. "It's exciting to be on a campus where the life of the mind is the most important part of what we do," says Hrabowski. "Students who play chess, who succeed in chess, tend to be serious. And we are a campus that works very aggressively to attract serious students."



Derrick Longo, a UMBC junior from Philadelphia who's been playing solid chess since grade school, is about as serious as they come. He turned down Penn and Carnegie Mellon to attend UMBC—without a scholarship as bait. This past December, the computer science major sat on the UMBC "A" team during the Pan Am games. Though his team placed third overall this year, Longo's spirit remains fierce. "We came together as a team, we played damn good chess, and we showed everyone that we are still the team to be reckoned with," he says.



Chess teams like UMBC's are made, not born, and Alan Sherman is a relentless recruiter. He gets in touch with the best high school players; he routinely telephones top chess coaches to identify up-and-coming talent; and he advertises the team in *Chess Life* magazine. (Longo was lured by an exhibition match sponsored by UMBC when he was still in high school.) In addition, the UMBC chess Web site generates inquiries from young players in the Middle East, Africa, Russia, and elsewhere who are seeking a ticket to an American education.

The Web is how Russian team member Oxana Tarassova found her way to UMBC. "I was dreaming of studying at an American university," she says. Although she had few connections and little money, she played a mean game of chess. An Internet search by friends turned up UMBC's Web site. "My dream came true when I found out that UMBC offers chess scholarships," she says. The school now covers 80 percent of her $9,000 tuition.

UMBC's success with chess has attracted imitators—among them the little-known Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC). Tucked away near Manhattan's financial district, BMCC is a two-year commuter school. As a division of the City University of New York, it also happens to be a haven for financially strapped immigrants. In December, BMCC's chess team—weighted with players from Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Egypt, not to mention Harlem—beat UMBC at its own game, winning the Pan Am tournament. Howard Prince, BMCC professor of social science and a chess team coach, crows that "it's a Hollywood dream story for a community college to go into a competition of that sort and defeat an Ivy League school such as Harvard."

Dream story or not, it seems unlikely that chess could ever outrank basketball, frat parties, or *South Park* as a popular campus obsession. Still, the number of high school chess clubs has tripled in the United States over the last five years. And colleges are pleased to raise their profile with the assistance of such a relatively inexpensive game.

Yet, for all its benefits, chess is not a game to be taken up lightly. As the seventeenth-century English cleric Robert Burton observed in *The Anatomy of Melancholy,* chess may be fine for courtiers—but it is "not altogether so convenient for such as are students." After all, "It is a game too troublesome for some men's braines, too full of anxiety...and very offensive to him that looseth the Mate."

AMY BERNSTEIN

ARCHIVE PHOTOS/LAMBERT

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DIVISION STREET

THIRTY YEARS AFTER PRESIDENT Lyndon Johnson's Kerner Commission warned that America was drifting "toward two societies—one black, one white—separate and unequal," scholars of U.S. race relations are still quarreling over whether the commission's dire prognostication has proved grimly prophetic or increasingly obsolete. In *American Apartheid,* a provocative 1993 study of U.S. housing segregation, Douglas Massey, chairman of the University of Pennsylvania's sociology department, and Nancy Denton, a sociologist at SUNY Albany, argued that the "two societies" have never been further apart. Hailed by their Harvard colleague Nathan Glazer as "the best-argued and most amply documented" book on the subject and awarded the American Sociological Association's Distinguished Publication Award, *American Apartheid* left one feeling that, for all that has changed since the civil rights movement, racial segregation remains the defining feature of American urban life.

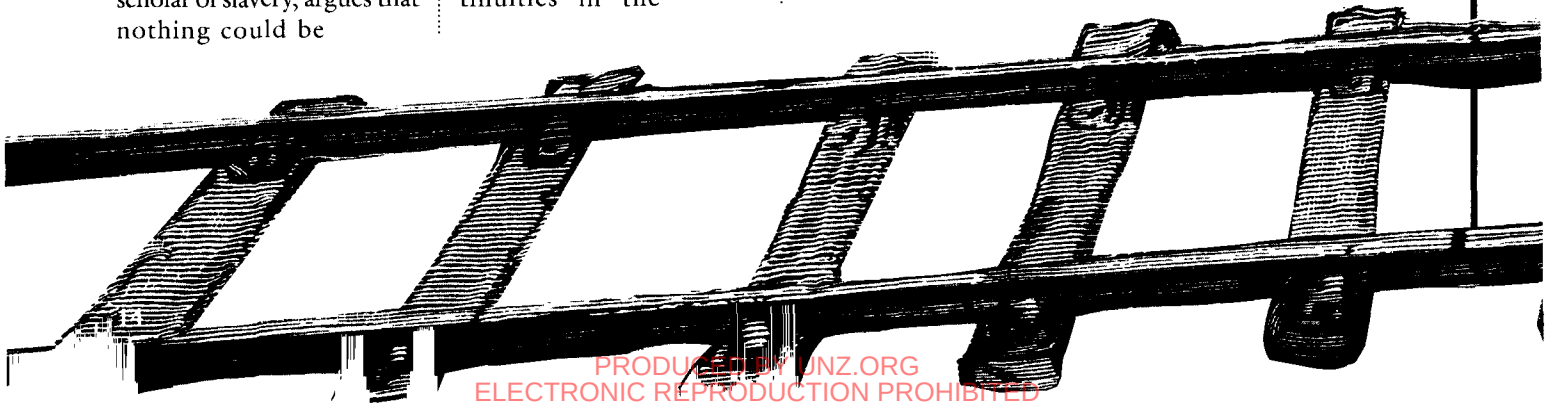
But in his new book, *The Ordeal of Integration* (Civitas, 1997), Orlando Patterson, the Jamaican-born Harvard sociologist and noted scholar of slavery, argues that nothing could be further from the truth. Some poor blacks do remain trapped in segregated ghettos, Patterson allows, but recent evidence culled from sociological studies and opinion polls shows that the dark picture drawn by Massey and Denton is "extremely misleading." Aiming to document the "remarkable facts of Afro-American progress" achieved in the past few decades—while defending affirmative action and other race-specific government policies as still necessary—Patterson proclaims that, in today's housing market, "any Afro-American family that truly desires to live in an integrated, predominantly Euro-American neighborhood...is capable of doing so."

> In Los Angeles, blacks earning more than $50,000 still live in far more segregated communities than the poorest Hispanics.

So, what gives? To bolster their case, Massey and Denton point to disturbing continuities in the so-called index of segregation—a standard measure used by demographers to indicate how many blacks would have to move into another neighborhood within a given city to achieve an even racial distribution across all neighborhoods. (In a city with an index of 0, nobody has to move to make every neighborhood look the same, while a rating of 100 indicates that all blacks are concentrated in just one neighborhood.) Assessing data for the thirty cities with the largest black populations, where more than half of all blacks in the United States reside, Massey and Denton note that, as late as 1980, the *average* index of segregation was a shockingly high 80 in the largest Northern cities and just slightly lower in the Southern cities. By 1990 the northern figure had dropped a bit—to 78—but it nevertheless remained "roughly 20 points above the highest level ever recorded for any European ethnic group," including earlier generations of Irish and East European immigrants.

"I'm not disagreeing that spatial segregation still exists," says Patterson in response to these figures. "What I'm contesting is what it all means." The trouble with the index of segregation, he feels, is that it fails to indicate *why* such levels of segregation persist. In Patterson's view, the fundamental remaining barrier to integration is not racism but class inequality. Citing recent surveys of Detroit residents, he notes that most people no longer "invoke racial stereotypes" to explain why they avoid living in predominantly black neighborhoods, and instead describe fears of declining real-estate values and rising crime. This, writes Patterson, signals "class-based, rather than purely racist, aversion to integration." Echoing William Julius Wilson's *The Declining Significance of Race* (1978), Patterson pointedly accuses Massey and other liberal sociologists of harping on racism to the exclusion of "the far greater and more fundamental problem" of growing income inequality.

Of course, as Massey and Denton point out in *American Apartheid,* seemingly color-blind concerns about quality of life can often mask deep-seated racial biases, with white homeowners pejoratively viewing blacks as agents of social pathology. Moreover, even if some scholars carelessly elide the distinction between race and class, Massey and Denton take pains to show that, in Los Angeles, for example, blacks earning more than $50,000 still live in far more segregated communities than the poorest Hispanics, just as middle-class blacks in San Francisco are more segregated than the city's poorest Asian Americans. Says Massey: "Middle-class people always try to get away from poor people—the difference is that middle-class blacks do it within a segregated world." Not surprisingly, while Patterson echoes Wilson's emphasis on class, Massey has criticized Wilson's work; at the 1997 meeting of the American



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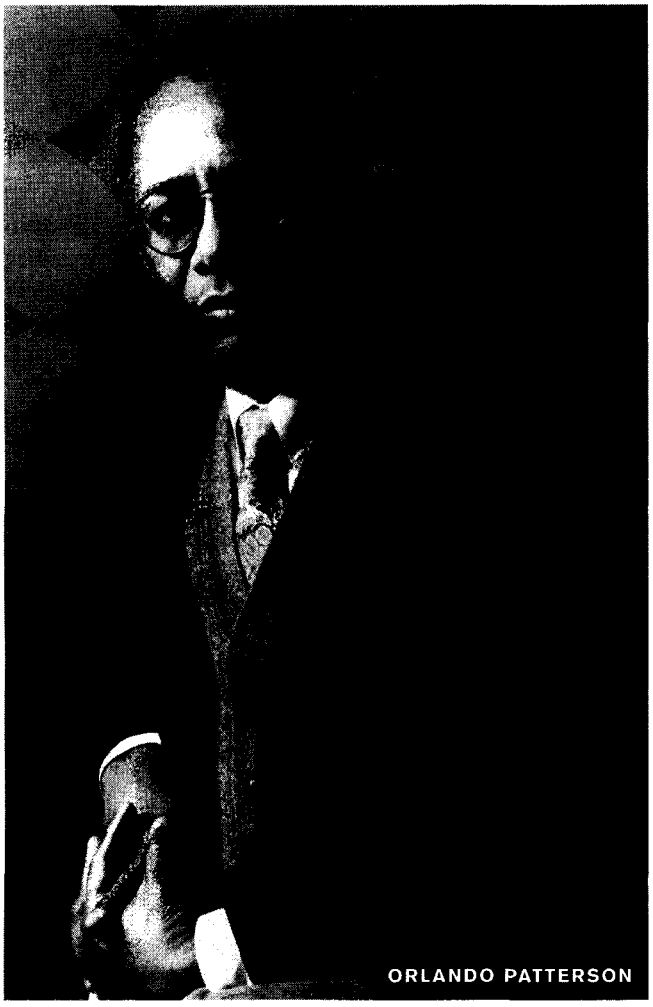

ORLANDO PATTERSON

MARY LEE/HARVARD NEWS OFFICE

Sociology Association, he fervently assailed Wilson's recently published book, *When Work Disappears*, for favoring "class-specific over race-specific policies" to alleviate poverty.

Patterson, though, does have an answer for why even affluent blacks remain concentrated in predominantly black neighborhoods: "Persisting segregation is partly—and for most middle-class Afro-Americans, largely—a voluntary phenomenon," he insists. In a 1997 Gallup survey, he notes, 74 percent of African Americans expressed satisfaction about the (often segregated) neighborhoods they inhabit—a figure that, just two decades ago, was only 45 percent. Moreover, in a 1991 study, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) found that, although some black home seekers clearly are the victims of discriminatory practices, the once widespread practice of "steerage"—in which whites and blacks are systematically offered homes in different neighborhoods—is now quite "low" (there is still a 13 percent chance that blacks will be subjected to discrimination, the HUD study found). Some left-leaning sociologists can't acknowledge this, Patterson charges, because of "the bizarre cult of the victim," which leads them patronizingly to view "all Afro-Americans as a single, homogeneous group of downtrodden outsiders, racked with chronic problems and constantly sour about their lot."

Patterson has a point: Some black people may simply prefer to live in black communities. On the other hand, as Massey notes, such attitudes can be interpreted as a sign less of contentment than of "battle fatigue." "Blacks do sometimes express reluctance about integration," he explains. "But if you probe further, it's often based on legitimate fears that they will be unwelcome and will experience harassment or even violence in white neighborhoods. I don't call that voluntary." Massey further contends that Patterson is "low-balling" the extent of racism that persists in the housing market by isolating just one form of discrimination: steerage. In *American Apartheid*, he and Denton combine various forms of bias—including "discrimination with a smile," in which seemingly friendly realtors withhold information from their black clientele, and discriminatory lending practices by banks—and conclude that the odds are a whopping 90 percent that blacks will experience some form of discrimination during a typical housing search.

Even if one accepts this figure, however, Patterson alleges it's of less significance than Massey and Denton imply. That's because where people live can mask other profound changes in their lives. A recent study of Detroit by a team of sociologists, he notes, found that, regardless of housing patterns, it appears that racial interaction in schools, the workplace, and other social settings has risen dramatically since the late 1960s. And in the most recent Gallup poll, three-fourths of blacks said they have a "close friend" who is white. Patterson draws hope from this—chiding social scientists for overlooking important changes in interpersonal relations—while noting that such changes can paradoxically create the perception that race relations are getting *worse*. "As individuals in both groups meet more and more, the possibility for conflict is bound to increase.... Things appear to get worse...*because* they are getting better."

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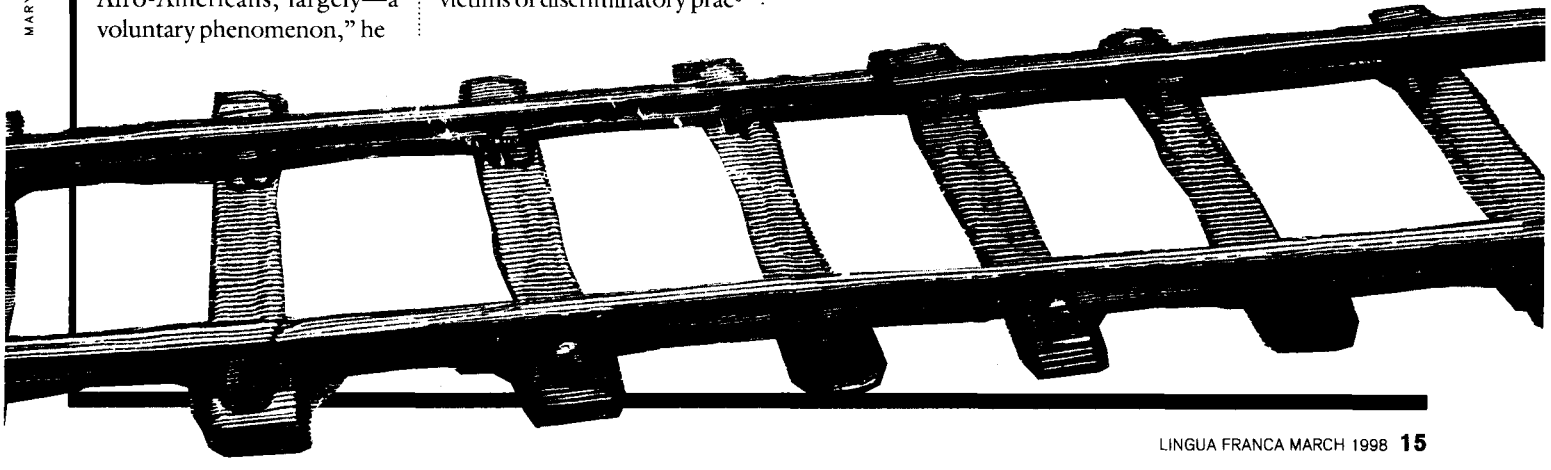

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LOSING THEIR RELIGION

SOME HISPANICS IN NEW Mexico, following a long-standing family custom, do not eat pork. Some separate milk and meat. Others light candles on Friday nights or refrain from work on Saturdays. Their children spin small wooden gambling tops with letters on their four sides. When relatives die, they cover the mirrors.

Not exactly typical Roman Catholic practices—but then, a growing number of Hispanics in the state are beginning to believe they are not typical Roman Catholics after all. Rather, they suspect these family traditions descend from Sephardic Jewish ancestors who secretly practiced their religion during and even after the Inquisition and the Expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492. Such assumptions are hardly new; it's just that they used to be discussed behind closed doors. Now, crypto-Judaism is finally coming out of the closet.

Enticed by reports of this exotic lost tribe, researchers in anthropology, folklore, ethnology, and other disciplines have descended on New Mexico. Some are focusing on intriguing practices like ritual animal slaughter, others on markers like the Star of David often seen on headstones. Stanley Hordes, a historian with the University of New Mexico's Latin American Institute, says he and a group of researchers have found evidence that some Hispanics tend to develop autoimmune diseases that show up more commonly among Jews than among other populations. Even so, he cautions, it's best not to jump to conclusions. As scholars in this burgeoning field are discovering, evidence of crypto-Judaism is often contradictory and difficult to interpret. Indeed, at least one scholar has concluded that the presumed Jewish ancestry of these southwestern Hispanics is pure fantasy.

As a phenomenon in the past, crypto-Judaism is widely accepted. David Gitlitz, the author of *Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews* (Jewish Publication Society, 1996), estimates that forty thousand crypto-Jews—known as *anusim* in Hebrew, or the more pejorative *Marrano* in Spanish (for swine)—lived in various corners of the Spanish Empire for centuries after the Expulsion. By the late eighteenth century, he argues, the vast majority had been assimilated into the mainstream population. Yet the legacy of secrecy was so ingrained that some crypto-Jews continued to live incognito long after the Inquisition was over. One such community, discovered by a Polish engineer in the remote village of Belmonte, Portugal, in 1917, only went public as Jewish a few years ago.

Nevertheless, Gitlitz cautions, the contemporary incidence of crypto-Judaism is still

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In the Southwest, Crypto-Judaism is finally coming out of the closet.

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relatively unexamined. "There are a variety of activists in the field," says Gitlitz, "but academic attention has not turned to it that much." Furthermore, he says, the "recoverists"—as he terms those who identify Jewish roots in the Hispanic population—can sometimes be overly enthusiastic in their research. "I've seen cases of interviews where there were lots of leading questions," he says. "They are basically planting interpretations. 'You wash, you must be preparing for the Sabbath. You eat a lot of fruit in the fall, that must be Sukkot.' Maybe yes, maybe no."

A growing number of scholars share Gitlitz's skepticism. They cite the work of Hungarian-born professor Raphael Patai, who visited the "Jewish Indians" of Venta Prieta, Mexico in the 1940s and the 1960s. These Indians belonged to the Iglesia de Dios, a Protestant church with many Hebraic practices—and traced their ancestry to Spanish Sephardim. But after investigating the tribe, Patai determined that the group's

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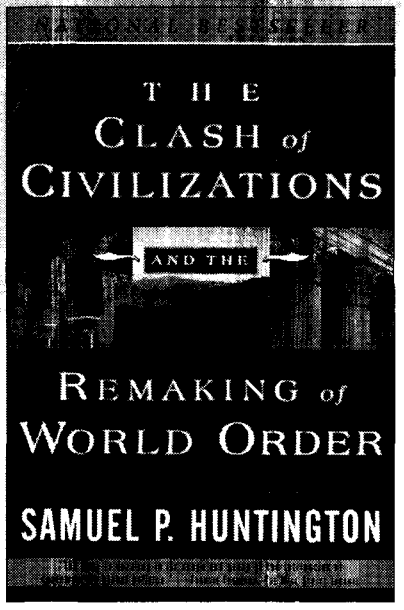

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faith originated with the American Church of God, an evangelical group that believes the only true Jews follow Jesus. "Their Marrano descent," he concluded in a 1965 article, "was nothing but a pious fairy tale."

Judith F. Neulander, a folklorist at Indiana University, believes the same is true of the Hispanics who claim Jewish heritage in New Mexico. Neulander visited the state in 1992. "I went there thinking that these were crypto-Jews because of all the hype," she says. "It was a long, slow, and disillusioning process." What was most striking to her was that customs often cited as evidence of crypto-Judaism descend not from Sephardic practice but from Ashkenazi, Protestant, and other traditions. Take the spinning top that looks like the Hanukkah dreidel: It was, she notes, prevalent in many cultures—though not, as far as scholars know, in Sephardic Iberia.

In 1994 Neulander published an article on her research in the Emory University–based journal *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review*, blasting scholars like Hordes for misinterpreting evidence and planting ideas in the minds of their subjects. Her four-page item, says the journal's editor, Guy Haskell, sparked more controversy than any in its twenty-year history. He received so many responses that he decided to devote an entire issue to the subject of crypto-Judaism in the American Southwest. Dated 1996, it appeared last November—delayed, he says, partly by his efforts to tone down language in the submissions that would have opened the publication to libel litigation. The issue features Patai's two essays on Venta Prieta, contributions by several scholars describing their research in the field, an essay by Neulander expanding on her previous article, and several refutations of it.

> Enticed by reports of an exotic lost tribe, researchers have descended on New Mexico.

One defender of crypto-Judaism is Seth Kunin, an anthropologist at the University of Nottingham. He argues that even Ashkenazi artifacts like the dreidel may in fact be evidence of genuine Sephardic heritage. "When the crypto-Jews first encountered Ashkenazis who were openly Jewish, they may have selected items from the Ashkenazi repertoire that would allow them to express themselves as Jews," he says. "From an anthropological perspective, we would never expect crypto-Jewish culture to be exactly what it was when the Jews were expelled from Spain. We would expect it to be a transformed culture."

After all, as Gitlitz writes in his book, such transformations have been a hallmark of crypto-Judaism from the moment Jews were forced underground. They relied on memory rather than prayer books, celebrated holidays without calendars, and, as the centuries wore on, were increasingly removed from authentic Jewish practice. So it was not surprising to find references to crypto-Jews venerating a Saint Esther on Purim or abstaining from pork

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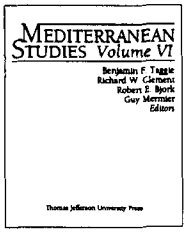

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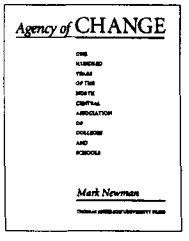

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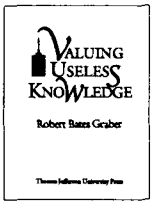

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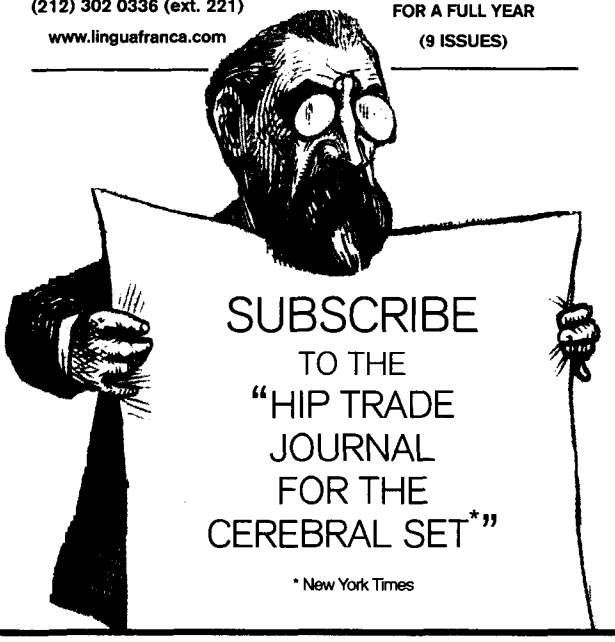

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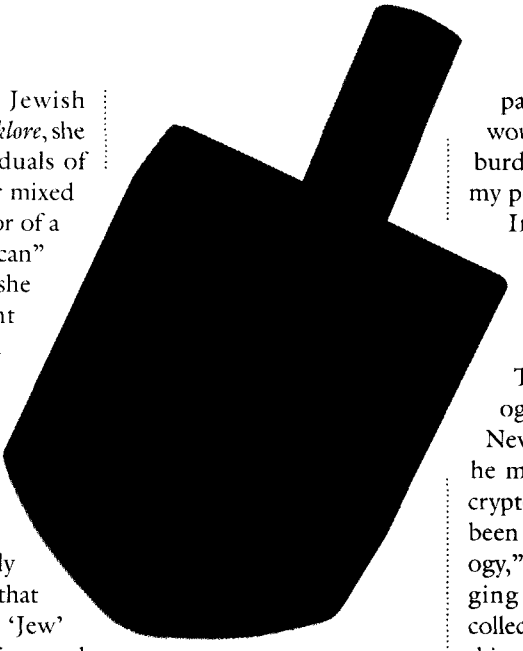
"I am Hispanic. I am a female. Why would I seek to add another burden of being a Jewess to my persona?"

for the forty days prior to Yom Kippur. Practices in New Mexico would have undergone a similar metamorphosis, Gitlitz speculates. "I started out skeptical and dismissive," he says. "I'm still skeptical but no longer dismissive. I've come to realize that there are probably several possible insertion points for customs. The question is tracking them down."

According to Neulander, scholars are not the only group guilty of perpetrating an anthropological fiction. She questions the motives of Hispanics who claim Jewish descent. In *Jewish Folklore*, she accused such individuals of seeking to shed their mixed racial heritage in favor of a white, "Euro-American" bloodline. "Thus," she wrote, "a significant number of regional claims to Sephardic descent have distinctly racist features." (In the journal's special issue, she adds that it is also a "disturbingly anti-Semitic claim in that it empties the word 'Jew' of all religious meaning, and in genuinely medieval tradition, fills it with pseudo-scientific 'racial' connotations.")



Not surprisingly, Neulander's insinuations have provoked indignant responses among some active crypto-Jews. "I find the thesis of the non-existence of New Mexican crypto-Jews by Neulander to be analogous to the popular belief of neo-Nazis who believe that the Holocaust is a fable," fumes Isabelle Medina Sandoval in *Jewish Folklore*. "I am Hispanic. I am female. Why would I seek to add another burden of being a Jewess to my persona?"

In the end, it may be impossible to determine the historical validity of New Mexican crypto-Jewry, says Tomàs Atencio, a sociologist at the University of New Mexico who believes he may be descended from crypto-Jews. "I know I have been criticized on methodology," he says. "But this is digging out from a historical collective unconscious certain things that you couldn't get out any other way. It's like psychoanalysis." He adds, "This kind of thing lends itself more to literature than sociology. I'm not trying to prove anything. I'm trying to understand."

ROBIN CEMBALEST

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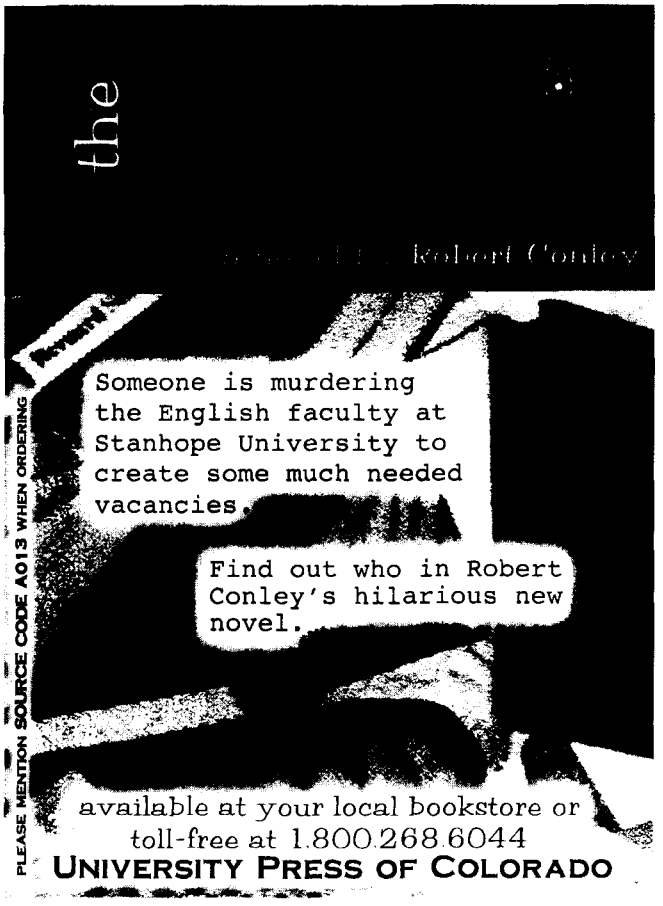
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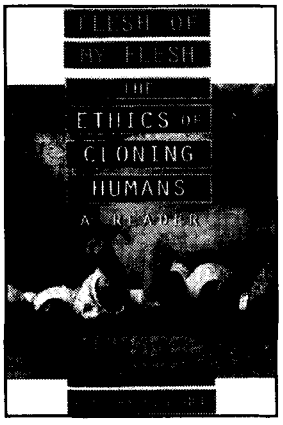

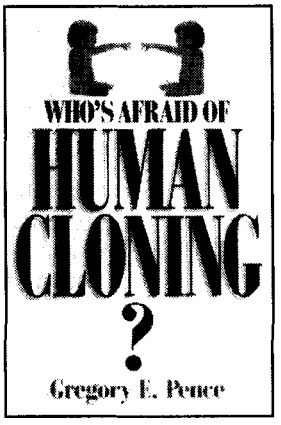

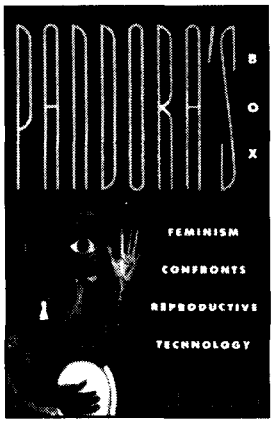

GREGORY E. PENCE, EDITOR

Flesh of My Flesh

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A Reader

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Breakthrough *Books*

WE ASKED NINE SCHOLARS TO COMMENT ON RECENT BOOKS ABOUT **RACE.**

Jacqueline Jones, professor of American history at Brandeis University and author of *American Work: Four Centuries of Black and White Labor* (Norton, 1998).

"The 'conversation on race' initiated by President Clinton has generated a lot of headlines, but it hasn't helped to illuminate the power of racial ideologies. In the United States, elites developed a particular ideology of race in order to exploit the labor of people of African descent. Today we should focus not on data from polls that ask how people feel about race, but on the persistence of segregated employment and housing. A good place to begin a meaningful conversation about such issues is **Thomas J. Sugrue**'s *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, 1996), which details the variety of forces—from the racism of city council members and real estate agents to the deindustrialization of the auto industry workforce—that kept blacks out of good jobs, good schools, and suburban neighborhoods."

....

Michael Tomasky, political columnist at *New York* magazine and author of *Left for Dead: The Life, Death, and Possible Resurrection of Progressive Politics in America* (Free Press, 1996).

"My abiding opinion is that we could do with a moratorium on race books for the next five years. The field has been tilled many times, and it doesn't seem like much is growing there. The cultural left's well has been drying up; the cultural right has nothing to add; in the middle, passionate defenses of (or attacks on) affirmative action basically restate old arguments. Nevertheless, in *Race, Crime, and the Law* (Pantheon, 1997), **Randall Kennedy** does take the conversation in a few new directions. Kennedy is trying to find that place where racial interests and the community interest meet—where race can be both accounted for and transcended. His research and method are airtight and meticulous, and his refusal to ignore facts that might interfere with his argument exemplifies the open-mindedness we need more of on this topic."

....

Bill Ong Hing, visiting professor of law at the University of California at Davis and author of *To Be an American: Cultural Pluralism and the Rhetoric of Assimilation* (NYU, 1997).

"If only every member of President Clinton's commission on race relations would read a book like **Angelo Ancheta**'s *Race, Rights, and the Asian American Experience* (Rutgers, 1998). Given the country's ethnic diversity, especially in urban areas and the West, the commission's emphasis on black-white relations and its aversion to issues like affirmative action injure its credibility. Ancheta, a civil rights attorney, reminds us that Asian Americans have been a significant part of the nation's diversity. He chronicles the legal predicaments that Asian Americans have faced, providing an insightful study of a broad range of social and political issues from discrimination to identity and language. Although the book is choppy in places, Ancheta's insights—born of his broad community lawyering experiences—are a useful reminder that any dialogue on race must be broad. With any luck, the president's commission on race is listening."

VANILLA NIGHTMARES #7
BY ADRIAN PIPER

....

Ann Douglas, professor of comparative literature at Columbia University and author of *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1995).

"In *I Heard It Through the Grapevine: Rumor in African American Culture* (California, 1994), **Patricia Turner**, having conducted extensive interviews, analyzes the oral tradition by which black Americans interpret key events. These traditions often stress the covert role of government agencies, which is downplayed in the press. Rumors become a culture of knowledge, Turner concludes,

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when the demand for information far exceeds the supply. **Brenda Gayle Plummer**'s ***Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935–1960*** (UNC, 1996) shows that, contrary to much previous academic opinion, African Americans were engaged critics of U.S. intervention in the third world during the early decades of the Cold War. Surveying a wide variety of sources, Plummer disentangles diplomatic history from its sometimes crippling dependence on the state. Instead, she studies those whom foreign policy actually affects and who, she argues, can sometimes affect it in turn."

••••

Jane Lazarre, professor of writing at the New School for Social Research and author of *Beyond the Whiteness of Whiteness: Memoir of a White Mother of Black Sons* (Duke, 1997).

"Two collections, one of poetry—***Spirit & Flame: An Anthology of African-American Poetry*** (Syracuse, 1997), edited by **Keith Gilyard**—and one of essays, ***The House That Race Built*** (Vintage, 1998), edited by **Wahneema Lubiano**—cut through the denial about racism that discolors our knowledge of history and ourselves. 'The idea of race and the operation of racism are the best friends that the economic and political elite have in the United States,' Lubiano tells us in her introduction. The essayists in her collection, like the poets in Gilyard's, bring to light revealing stories about American politics and identity. Both collections do what Gilyard calls the 'serious literary work' of progressive political struggle by gathering voices that insist on the intimate relationship between our internal lives and social realities."

••••

Fred Siegel, professor of history at Cooper Union and author of *The Future Once Happened Here: New York, D.C., L.A., and the Fate of America's Big Cities* (Free Press, 1997).

"The debate over **Stephen** and **Abigail Thernstrom**'s ***America in Black and White: One Nation, Indivisible*** (Simon & Schuster, 1997) has centered mostly on affirmative action. That's a shame, since the most persuasive sections of the book demonstrate how, contrary to the views of cranks like Cornel West, the riots of the 1960s actually served to slow down black progress after World War II. The Detroit riot that left much of the city an economic wasteland was, they maintain, driven by neither poverty nor police injustice. At the time of the upheaval, the income of the typical black family in Detroit was merely 6 percent lower than that of the typical white family—the smallest differential in the country. With such statistics in mind, the Thernstroms conclude that the riots were 'the beginning of the end of a great deal of hope...that has never quite returned.'"

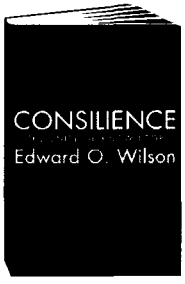
••••

Tyler Stovall, professor of history at University of California at Santa Cruz and author of *Paris Noir: African-Americans in the City of Light* (Houghton Mifflin, 1996).

Stovall recommends **Robin D.G. Kelley**'s ***Yo' Mama's Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America*** (Beacon, 1997). "Kelley has written widely on

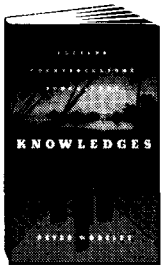
Knowledge Re-enlightened, Redefined and Rewritten

Consilience
The Unity of Knowledge
by Edward O. Wilson



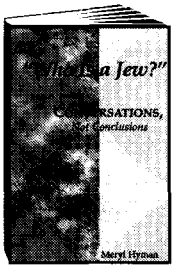
E.O. Wilson, the pioneer of sociobiology and biodiversity, once again breaks out of the conventions of current thinking. This groundbreaking book argues for the unity of all knowledge and the need to search for "consilience"–the proof that our world is organized by a small number of fundamental natural laws that comprise the principles governing every branch of learning. *(Knopf) hardcover, 20% discounted price: $20.80**

Knowledges
Culture, Counterculture, Subculture
by Peter Worsley



Why is a tribal people's knowledge of the natural world considered "ethnoscience" rather than simply "science?" Peter Worsley set out to write about the scientific knowledge of an Australian aboriginal tribe, but his research grew to challenge conventional ways of thinking about science and culture. His magnum opus makes a powerful case for the plurality of knowledge systems. *(New Press) hardcover, 20% discounted price: $28.00**

Who Is A Jew?
Conversations, Not Conclusions
by Meryl Hyman



The definition of "who is a Jew?" is as important now as before the Holocaust. As timely as the newspaper headlines about Orthodox influence on Israel and the growth in the U.S. "Jews for Jesus," this book offers insight into an ancient subject. Veteran newsperson, Meryl Hyman provides the information Jews need to conclude for themselves whether they are truly one people. *(Jewish Lights) hardcover, 20% discounted price: $19.16**

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race, and in his newest book he inverts intellectual hierarchies by both exposing the 'culture of poverty' of social science analyses of race and taking on various opponents of multiculturalism, from black conservatives to the 'angry white men of the Left.' Kelley argues that such positions neglect how both free-market capitalism and the working class have been built on the principle of racial exclusion. To argue otherwise is to denigrate the achievements of African-Americans and do violence to the historical record. *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional!* is a book to make one both think and laugh: Anyone who can coin the phrase 'She's a Bricolage House' clearly has many insights to offer."

••••

David J. Dent, professor of journalism at New York University and author of *Journeys in the Black* (Simon & Schuster, forthcoming).

Dent recommends **Orlando Patterson**'s ***The Ordeal of Integration: Progress and Resentment in America's "Racial" Crisis*** (Civitas, 1997), "which argues that enormous progress has been made toward the goal of full racial equality in America, though problems persist. What makes Patterson's seemingly simple idea so provocative and original is its independence from the predictable liberal and conservative camps on race. Patterson's opposition to the racial gerrymandering of congressional districts has won him few cheers from liberals. Nor have conservatives applauded his book's strongest chapter, 'Why We Still Need Affirmative Action,' which argues that affirmative action is not a system of racial preferences but a means of advocating equality of opportunity. I wonder, though, how someone so thoughtful can remain so optimistic, particularly when the debate on race is still driven by camps that, as Patterson himself shows, are out of touch with how most Americans live."

••••

Werner Sollors, professor of American civilization at Harvard University and author of *Neither Black nor White Yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (Oxford, 1997).

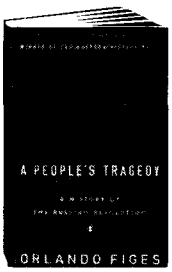
"Among classic works on race I would like to see back in print is the antifascist book ***Racism*** (1938), by the sexual scientist **Magnus Hirschfeld,** who pioneeringly gave racism (used by anti-Semites as a positive concept) a bad name. For those who examine race in Latin America, the 1996 catalog of the New York Americas Society Art Gallery, ***New World Orders: Casta Painting and Colonial Latin America***, edited by **Ilona Katzew**, makes available the whole range of *mestizaje* paintings, which depict interracial family situations, in excellent reproductions. Equally valuable is **Jennifer Fleischner**'s ***Mastering Slavery: Memory, Family, and Identity in Women's Slave Narratives*** (NYU, 1996), which examines representative slave narratives and abolitionist fiction from a psychoanalytic viewpoint. Fleischner puts to rest ill-founded fears that psychoanalysis, a European discipline, is not suited to the topic of American race relations—an argument that in itself suggests the continuing power of race."

JOHN PALATTELLA

A People's Tragedy

A History of the Russian Revolution

by Orlando Figes



Unlike previous accounts that trace the revolution's origins to overreaching political forces and ideals, Figes argues that the failure of democracy in 1917 was deeply rooted in Russian culture and social history. Further, he contends that what had started as a people's revolution contained the seeds of its degeneration into violence and dictatorship. This book won the Wolfson History Prize. *(Penguin) paperback, 20% discounted price: $15.96**

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A History of Twentieth-Century Russia

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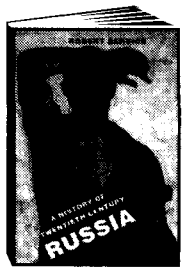

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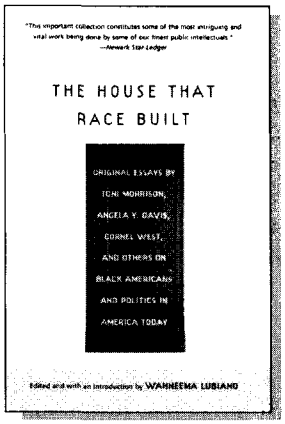

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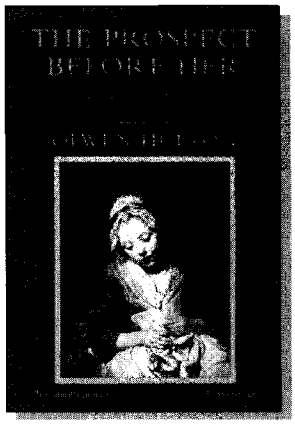

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Inside*Publishing*

PRIZE FRIGHT

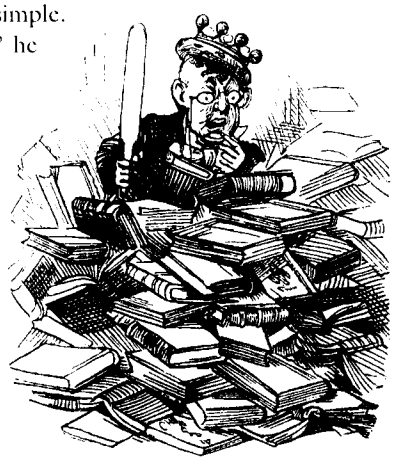
THE LONDON LITERATI LOVE TO COMPLAIN about the annual Booker Prize, the £20,000 award celebrating the best British novel of the year. The moment the judges laurel a work like *Possession* or *The God of Small Things*, critics line up to be the first to slam the winner as "vapid" (Byatt) or "incomprehensible" (Roy). However, the National Cash Registers (NCR) award, Britain's most prestigious nonfiction prize, has traditionally been a quieter affair. For example, last year's winner—Orlando Figes's *A People's Tragedy*, a narrative history of the Russian Revolution—was universally greeted as a worthy title. But the £27,000 prize did nonetheless cause a considerable row: Soon after a few terribly honest judges admitted that the committee hadn't gotten around to plowing through all the entries, sponsor NCR canceled the ten-year-old competition for good.

So what happened? Prior to the awards ceremony, Clive Anderson, a television personality who served as panel chairman, assured the public that all 122 titles were properly read by at least one judge. However, the night of the posh celebration dinner at London's Dorchester Hotel, several panelists let it slip that a team of "professional readers" had provided the five-person celebrity panel with assistance in the form of short "preliminary reports." Indeed, one panelist confided to the *The Observer* that a fellow judge had failed to read *any* of the books in their entirety.

All this struck many British wags as cheating. When *The Observer* pressed chairman Anderson about the exact number of books he had read, he said, "Dozens, that's about as precise as I can be, though I didn't read every word because you can tell if a book's bad from the title or from the first page or the second page or the third page...."

David Taylor, a writer for the British publishing chronicle *The Bookseller*, also defended his honor to *The Observer*. "We are busy working people," he protested. "We just haven't got the time. Some of the books are 500-page jobs on subjects such as...the death of the British countryside." To be fair, unlike those "professional readers," the judges do have a lot to juggle: Among the panelists were London *Times* columnist Nigella Lawson and astronomer Heather Couper—who was so busy trotting the globe that she requested committee meetings be held near Heathrow.

British literary critic Robert McCrum was unmoved by the panelist's special pleading, noting in *The Observer* that no French literary-prize judge would admit to such a crime. (He did not, of course, claim the French judge would actually *finish* the reading.) For McCrum, the moral was simple. "Subcontract your reading to outsiders," he intoned, "and you undermine the consequence of the whole enterprise."



Apparently, NCR agreed: The Ohio-based computer corporation announced this past December that sponsorship of the prize "no longer fits comfortably" with its marketing strategy. But were such extreme measures necessary? As author Blake Morrison suggested to *The Observer*, perhaps the sponsor could have taken a tip from the Booker: Despite grumblings from publishing companies, Booker officials recently restricted the number of books publishers could submit to two. The new system supposedly ensures that every book is read by at least one judge.

Most literary-prize committees get by just fine with a little skimming on the sly.

Of course, most literary-prize committees get by just fine with a little skimming on the sly. The novelist William Gass claims that the practice is inevitable. Indeed, rush jobs "are very common when there are a lot of books being judged for a prize," he says. "You can toss some after five, ten pages." In most cases, he avers, it's difficult to get caught: "The more books, the larger the number of judges, the more people you can hide behind." But if judges do get caught, it's hardly a surprise that sponsors would be tempted to pull the plug. As Gass wrote in his 1985 essay, "Pulitzer: The People's Prize": "Someone always foots the bill, of course, and when the outcome doesn't smartly show the shoes, the shoes are inclined to squeak."

CHRISTINE HARAN

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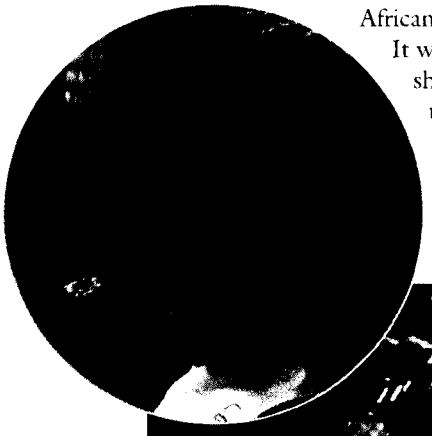
TWAINSPOTTING

SHELLEY FISHER FISHKIN'S 1993 BOOK, *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African-American Voices* (Oxford), arguably achieved the biggest crossover success in literary criticism in recent years. In that work, Fishkin asserted that the distinctive voice of Huckleberry Finn—that quintessentially all-American boy—was modeled, in part, on the speech of a young black waiter named "Sociable Jimmy," whom Twain had encountered at a Midwestern rooming house. She thus repositioned *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*—the most-taught novel in U.S. classrooms—as racially creole. But Fishkin, who teaches at the University of Texas at Austin, had never been to Hannibal, Missouri, where Twain grew up; so in 1995 she finally paid a visit in search of further evidence of Twain's engagement with African-American culture.



It wasn't an easy task: All she could find were figurines of black children eating watermelons in the Mark Twain Gift and Book Shop. But when Fishkin attended a Hannibal pageant dedicated to "the story of Mark Twain and his famous characters," she presumed she'd finally learn something: After all, the escaped slave Jim is one of Twain's most memorable creations. She discovered, however, that Jim had been whitewashed right out of the show. When the pageant turned to a memorable exchange between Huck and Jim—their hilarious argument about why a Frenchman doesn't "talk like a man"—the scene had been transformed into a prim dialogue, a kind of French lesson, between Huck and Tom Sawyer's Aunt Polly. Fishkin walked out in disgust.

FESTIVITIES IN HANNIBAL, MISSOURI

PHIL SCHOFIELD

This anecdote, which Fishkin touches on in her new book, *Lighting Out for the Territory: Reflections on Mark Twain and American Culture* (Oxford), evokes what she sees as the key problem with most Twain criticism: its suppression of the author's debt to African-American culture. In a literary and political atmosphere in which the gravest threat to *Huckleberry Finn*'s canonical stature is the novel's frequent use of the word "nigger"—which has led a number of parents, school administrators, and writers to condemn the book as racist—Fishkin's ingenious approach in *Was Huck Black?* reasserted the novel's virtue in the most reassuring way possible.

Fishkin's controversial argument is the latest in a long procession of efforts to see *Huckleberry Finn* as an exemplary tale. When Ernest Hemingway in 1935 proclaimed that "all modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*," his praise of a mere "boy's book" struck many as eccentric, but the assessment soon became the culture's common sense. Mid-century critics like Lionel Trilling and T.S. Eliot vaunted *Huckleberry Finn* as a slyly subversive assault on the hypocrisies of genteel culture and a masterful statement about how bonds of personal friendship could transcend the inhumanity of slavery.

The recent attacks made against Twain for his use of the word "nigger" threatened to undercut that reputation; but just as Hemingway, Trilling, and Eliot had made *Huckleberry Finn* safe for the humanist guardians of high culture, so Fishkin has made it safe—even necessary—for today's multicultural liberals. By drawing historical connections between Huck and "Sociable Jimmy," Fishkin neutralized the attacks on Twain's use of racist language; more importantly, she argued that the novel's ironic portrayal of white racists like Huck's father renders it a powerful tool for *fighting* racism in the classroom. "Mark Twain taught me things,"

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Fishkin writes in *Lighting Out for the Territory.* "He taught me to understand the raw racism that lay behind what I saw on the evening news."

For Jonathan Arac, however, such arguments are badly mistaken. In his new book, *Huckleberry Finn as Idol and Target* (Wisconsin), the University of Pittsburgh professor sharply questions the belief that reading *Huckleberry Finn* is a useful means of combating racism. Arac argues that our conversation about Twain's novel has got stuck in a rut, endlessly celebrating the "subversiveness" and iconoclasm of a literary work—and a protagonist—that's come to seem beyond reproach. But Arac insists that "it was no more heroic in the 1880s, when *Huckleberry Finn* was published, to show someone opposed to slavery than it would be in the 1950s to show someone opposed to Nazism." It doesn't make sense to invest Twain's protagonist or Twain himself—writing in Connecticut twenty years after the Civil War—with the moral courage an abolitionist may have possessed in the 1840s, when the novel takes place. If it's political engagement and progressive thinking on race you want, Arac suggests, why not teach Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*? That 1852 book, rejected by critics like Trilling as an unliterary "protest novel," may actually have helped bring about the Civil War with its devastating portrayal of the cruelties of the slave system. To tout *Huckleberry Finn*'s political and racial progressiveness while ignoring a writer like Stowe, Arac argues, is sheer bad faith. "The tremendous claims for *Huckleberry Finn* as a work of moral heroism are a form of liberal self-congratulation," he says.

Arac cites the famous scene where Huck declares that he'd rather go to hell than return his friend Jim to slavery, a moment that has become a central piece of evidence in the arguments for *Huckleberry Finn*'s iconoclastic power. In Trilling's seminal reading in *The Liberal Imagination,* what makes Huck's decision—"All right, then, I'll go to hell"—so thrilling is that he believes he deserves to be damned for flouting the laws of his slaveholding society: "He is as consciously *wicked* as any illicit lover of romance and he consents to be damned for a personal devotion, never questioning the justice of the punishment he has incurred." Most recently, Toni Morrison, in her introduction to the 1996 Oxford *Huckleberry Finn* (which Fishkin edited), sums up the post-Trilling view by describing this as "Huck's ultimate act of love, in which he accepts the endangerment of his soul." But Arac strives to deflate such arguments by noting that in the novel's very first pages, Huck has demonstrated that he knows full well the difference between heaven and hell and yet "couldn't see no advantage" in going to heaven. "From the beginning," Arac reminds us, "Huck has been ready to go to hell," and "there is therefore no actual drama in what is generally referred to as his 'crisis.'" Arac concludes: "I find the sequence much more powerful for making hell a joke than for the bravery of the boy believing he is facing hell."

Ultimately, Arac believes that *Huckleberry Finn*'s classroom critics are right to see the book as something less than a recipe for racial harmony. And he worries that an insensitive teacher could easily "create a classroom experience where the explosive term 'nigger' is put into everybody's mouths in ways that seem to license its use out of class as well." Yet despite his caustic commentary on Huck Finn worship, Arac's aim is not to deny the novel's virtues altogether; rather, he suggests that recent attempts to enlist Twain in contemporary battles against racism may be misusing a "tremendously funny" book whose merits reside altogether elsewhere.

"Fishkin believes that if only we could get everyone to read *Huckleberry Finn* and read it right, we'd be on our way to bettering American ways of thinking about race," Arac says. "But I would much rather see struggles on matters of race in America carried out in the political arena than masked behind school curricula and literary criticism." And he understands the costs of what he calls the "hypercanonization" of the novel to be literary as well as political. "If we force *Huckleberry Finn* to carry national-political burdens it wasn't made for," he writes, "we cannot rightly appreciate its sublime moments of moral comedy and stylistic mastery." Perhaps the worst thing about the Hannibal pageant wasn't that it suppressed Jim's presence—but that it turned an uproarious piece of writing into something dull.

IVAN KREILKAMP

PHIL SCHOFIELD

Arac argues that our conversation about *Huckleberry Finn* has got stuck in a rut.

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PHOTO SYNTHESIS

IT'S BEEN TWENTY-FIVE YEARS SINCE HAMPshire professor Michael Lesy published his dissertation as *Wisconsin Death Trip*—a discomfiting collage of stiff nineteenth-century portraiture and morbid newspaper clippings about madness and death in rural America. The book captured the fancy of necrophiliacs, earned the young photo historian a cult following, and provoked the disdain of Susan Sontag and other critics. Lesy, who teaches literary journalism, has since published seven more books, each one veering far from anything that could be called a beaten path in his already unusual field. But *Dreamland*, just released by the New Press, is perhaps Lesy's most surprising book to date—precisely because, to all appearances, it has a comfortable place on the average American coffee table.

"The name Michael Lesy connotes having dug out something bizarre, something overlooked," notes Yale American studies professor Alan Trachtenberg. Lesy's new book hardly seems to fit the bill. *Dreamland* is a collection of lyrical photographs widely used as postcards between 1900 and 1910. Shot on an expedition led by William Henry Jackson, the postcards depict burgeoning cities, booming mining towns, and Western villages nestled in the hollows of majestic landscapes. In the world Lesy reconstructs, Detroit is a city of lush parks and elegant squares, and Penn Station is a confection of delicate steel archways and metal lattices. Apart from the introduction and conclusion, the accompanying text is a restrained historical time line. The book paints an affectionate portrait of an era when now-familiar cityscapes were just beginning to take shape and Americans found themselves resolutely optimistic about the future.

FROM *DREAMLAND*: DETROIT, 1905

But Lesy is best known for a darker vision of photographic history. His 1973 *Wisconsin Death Trip* featured a trove of ordinary portrait photographs taken in Black River Falls, Wisconsin, during the 1890s. The subjects confront the viewer with frozen stares and rigid poses. To the contemporary eye, accustomed to cheerful snapshots and backlit studio portraits, there is something unsettling in the virtual rigor mortis of those gazes—and Lesy reinforces that uneasiness with a queasy collage of Black River Falls newspaper articles and other primary texts. Reported with chilling exactitude are the times, places, and presumed causes of local murders and suicides, the death toll from epidemic diseases, and the alarming frequency of incendiary fires and delusional behavior.

William Gass hailed the book in *The New York Times Book Review* as an "example of the poetry of history." Trachtenberg describes it as "less a book of photographic history than a very individual, very strong and clear interpretation of the misery and complexity, the perplexity of Wisconsin rural life." But in *On Photography*, Susan Sontag cited *Wisconsin Death Trip* as an example of the medium's inherently ambiguous and frequently misleading historical claims. She dismissed the book as a "rousing, fashionably pessimistic polemic, and totally whimsical as history." After all, couldn't Lesy have juxtaposed the same images with less provocative texts from the period—Sontag suggests diaries or love letters—to very different effect?

Even today, Missouri School of Journalism professor C. Zoe Smith assigns *Wisconsin Death Trip* to her history of photojournalism classes as an object lesson in the abuse of photographic evidence. Smith is disturbed by the way Lesy uses the deteriorated state of glass negatives and the photographic conventions of the late nineteenth century—the glassy stares, the images of dead babies in their coffins—to bolster his bleak interpretation of turn-of-the-century rural life. "I think historians owe certain

COURTESY OF THE NEW PRESS

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things to their readers," says Smith, "and he took great liberties with that first book."

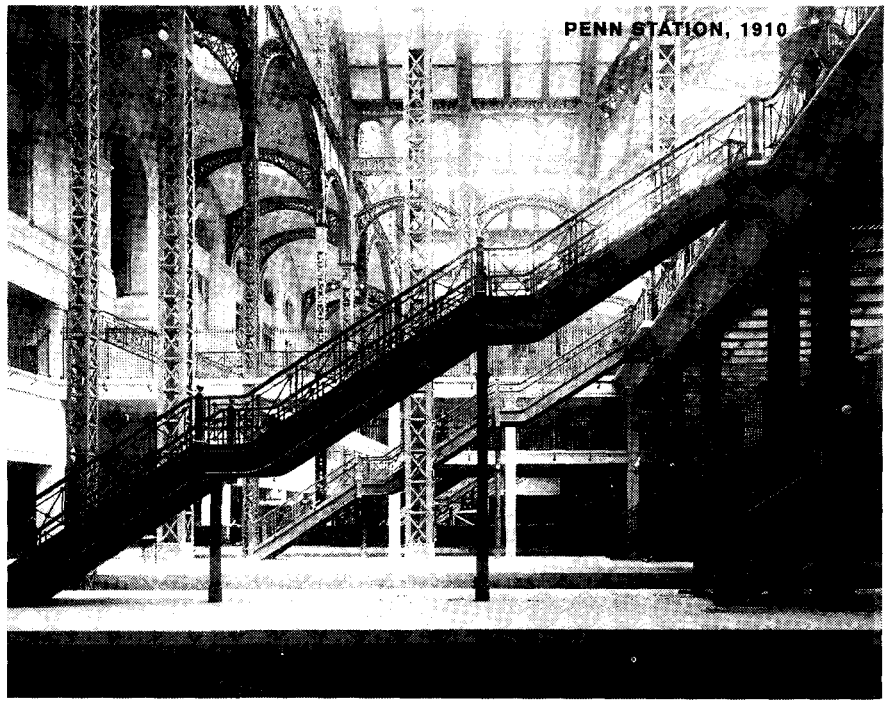
Remembering the critical response to *Wisconsin Death Trip*, Lesy heaves an exasperated sigh. "At that time, academics didn't know what to do with images," he says. "And then they read the text and said, 'this is all bad news.' My response was, sure it's bad news. You have overlooked some very important things in your narrative histories: terrible public health epidemics, plus a series of depressions in the 1890s."

Lesy stands by his first book as a transcription of some of the overlooked tribulations of nineteenth-century rural life, but he would be the last to argue that photography is a transparent medium, that it offers a direct view on the past. What he finds most compelling about photographs, in fact, is their ability to record fantasies as well as facts, the imagined transformation of life as much as its actuality. Ultimately, the artifice of photography is an advantage to the historian: It allows him to uncover fleeting aspects of the past that may have otherwise gone unrevealed.

For Lesy, these imaginings are often captured in the most banal forms of visual memory: snapshots and commercial photographs. Commissioned by customers, created by functionaries and conforming to visual conventions of their day, commercial photographs "tap right into the collective unconscious," says Lesy, who makes a habit of looking at tens of thousands of them before he compiles a single book. In *Real Life: Louisville in the Twenties* (1976), for example, Lesy juxtaposed upbeat promotional images of factory interiors with other, much grimmer pictures. Here and there, he counterposed a retouched image of a factory floor—tidy and sunlit—with a print from its original negative in which the same room appears dim, cluttered, and stained.

At first glance, then, *Dreamland* seems an incongruous addition to an oeuvre dedicated to the exhibition of disquieting juxtapositions. But this time, the viewer's tacit knowledge of late-twentieth-century life serves as a foil to the images, just as the un-retouched negatives in *Real Life* gave the lie to their altered prints. For the viewer, *Dreamland* is a portrait of an era when the forces of urbanization and industrialization were set inexorably into motion—leading to places unimagined by the people who bought and sent the postcards reproduced in the book. In *Dreamland*, Penn Station and downtown Detroit convey an aura of breathless optimism; later, they became symbols of urban blight.

All this is intriguing, but is it history? In his 1980 book, *Time Frames*, Lesy writes of the need for the historical profession "to begin to trust its senses in order to re-evaluate its definitions of evidence, investigation and discourse." Certainly, there are historians who have thought long and hard about the evidentiary uses of photographs—not least Alan Trachtenberg, whose 1989 *Reading American Photographs* argues eloquently for the relevance of photographers such as Alfred Stieglitz to the shaping and interpretation of American history. But Lesy remains a controversial figure in his efforts to draw historical insight primarily, if not exclusively, from the depths of prosaic photographs.



PENN STATION, 1910

Lesy believes the artifice of photography is an advantage to the historian.

Sontag was unsettled by Lesy's use of these methods in his first book. She was wary of photography's claim to record direct impressions—a claim which imbues them, like quotations, with an aura of incontrovertible authenticity. That photographs can be manipulated in the service of a contentious interpretation of historical events—as they arguably were in *Wisconsin Death Trip*—speaks to the slipperiness of their message and the deceptiveness of their power.

For his part, Lesy sees the same picture another way. "Images are always a combination of lies and truth intermixed, stacked on top of each other and inside each other," he says. "Academics hate photos because they hate paradoxes. They like linear arguments. What photos can do—if you let them—is to move toward truth and falsehood at the same time."

LAURA SECOR

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LOVE IT OR LEAVIS

F.R. LEAVIS (1895–1978) INTRODUCED A DEGREE OF vitriol into literary debate that the English profession had never seen before. Not that literature departments were immune to faculty infighting before the Cambridge don arrived on the scene in the 1930s, but most of the quarrels fell under the rubric of internecine turf battles, power plays, and ego rivalries. The literary opinions of aca demic critics were barely discussed inside the universities, let alone disputed in public forums. But Leavis was different. With imperious aplomb, he commanded his students to snub Thackeray, Fielding, Balzac, Defoe, Trollope, and Mrs. Gaskell—and by extension the stodgy Victorian dons who taught them. He championed T.S. Eliot and he taught the banned *Ulysses* with reverential enthusiasm. When the English literature establishment deemed D.H. Lawrence too obscene for canonization, Leavis promptly anointed him the greatest writer in the world.

It seems particularly ironic that the man whose opinions spawned generations of literary bickering has been effectively silenced today. Yet, despite two hefty biographies of Leavis appearing in the last year alone, nearly all of his twenty-five principal books are either out of print or out of stock.

This month, however, Ivan Dee Publishers comes to the rescue, with new editions of three major Leavis titles—*Revaluation* (1936), *The Living Principle* (1975), and the posthumously published *The Critic as Anti-Philosopher* (1982). Although this leaves the Cambridge critic's most famous work, *The Great Tradition* (1948), still out of print, the three rereleased volumes provide some typically fierce assessments. In the preface to *The Living Principle,* for example, Leavis manages to slam the *Times Literary Supplement,* Kingsley Amis, and W.H. Auden in a single sentence. In *The Critic as Anti-Philosopher,* he explains that there's no point in reading *Finnegans Wake* because, "as a matter of fact, Joyce's subconscious is worse than boring; it is offensively spurious." In *Revaluation,* he tells us that reading Shelley is a waste of time because of his imprecise use of language: "In what respects are the 'loose clouds' like 'decaying leaves'?" *Revaluation* also includes Leavis's most infamous criticism, a scathing indict-

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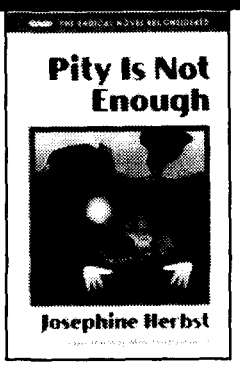

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ment of Milton: "So complete, and so mechanically habitual, is Milton's departure from the English order, structure and accentuation that he often produces passages that have to be read through several times before one can see how they go, though the Miltonic mind has nothing to offer that could justify obscurity—no obscurity was intended: it is merely that Milton has forgotten the English language."

Not surprisingly, Leavis's colleagues exacted a stiff price for his impertinence. The curmudgeonly critic did not receive a part-time lectureship at Cambridge until 1936, four years after the publication of his first book, *New Bearings in English Poetry*. Then he had to wait eleven more years—until he was over fifty—for a full-time appointment. Leavis's rhetoric became even more laced with invective during the 1960s and 1970s, as he raged against what he considered a decline in standards and "seriousness."

Nevertheless, despite his formidable temper and impossible standards, students found Leavis's approach to literature inspiring, and he enjoyed numbers of dedicated followers, known as Leavisites. Disciples such as Morris Shapira and Marius Bewley rallied behind Leavis and his journal, *Scrutiny*, hoping to qualify as part of the discriminating minority that could feel "significance itself, unmediated." For Leavis, the ideal life belonged to literature and its strenuous readers—and stood in opposition to science and bourgeois philistinism. Columbia University professor Steven Marcus, who was a graduate student at Cambridge in the 1950s, describes how impressionable students could become so enthralled by the master: "He'd make you feel that you absolutely had to understand how this poem is great and another is not. Your whole intellectual and moral being depended on it. You felt as if your soul was up for salvation or damnation."

Leavis commanded his students to snub Thackeray, Fielding, Balzac, Defoe, Trollope, and Gaskell—for starters.

When Marcus told Leavis that he was working on Dickens, the professor dismayed his student by replying that Dickens's oeuvre was mere entertainment—except for *Hard Times*. "Leavis was a beacon of seriousness, responsiveness, and intelligence and a compelling teacher," says Marcus. "But if you fell

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JOHN CLEAVE

under his spell, he could ruin you. One had to struggle hard to maintain independence while working with him." The daunting aspect of this struggle was captured in Frederick Crews's 1963 satire of literary critics, *The Pooh Perplex*. In the parody titled "Another Book to Cross Off Your List," Leavis's doppelgänger explains:

> There was an undergraduate just last week asking me which of Shakespeare's plays he should start with, to work up Shakespeare for his examinations. "Shakespeare!" I said. "Why, man, you haven't even read The Rainbow yet! Don't talk to me of Shakespeare until you've gone through Lawrence twice and made a list of eve to say against the Establishment." He hard, but the point is, he took it. Ano from dilettantism, if I may put it thu

If Leavis's absence from bookstor s has been little noticed over the last decade, is his work still rele vant to literary studies? Princeton English professor Michael Wood says a healthy infusion of Leavis might be a salutary thing in an age of hyper-professionalized theory and diffidence about literary taste: "Our job as professors of English has become more interpretive than judgmental—we're professional interpreters. Now these judgmental canon calls are being made by institutions. Sure, people are going to say that Leavis is too dogmatic. And he is. But one could make the argument that the dogmatism has shifted from the individual to movements and teams. It might be refreshing to reintroduce the urge to make judgments."

Wo k to add that he thinks Leavis's vitriolic temp "did more damage than good" but the value of his passion cannot be underestimated. "There is a subtle difference between being fair and open and being indifferent," says Wood. "Sometimes we lose that, and liberal indifference can be deadly."

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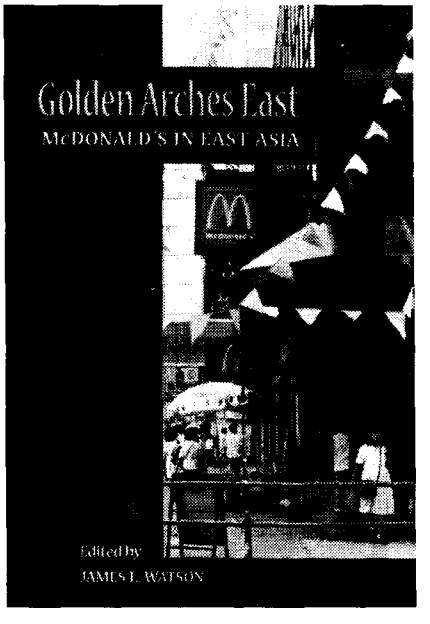

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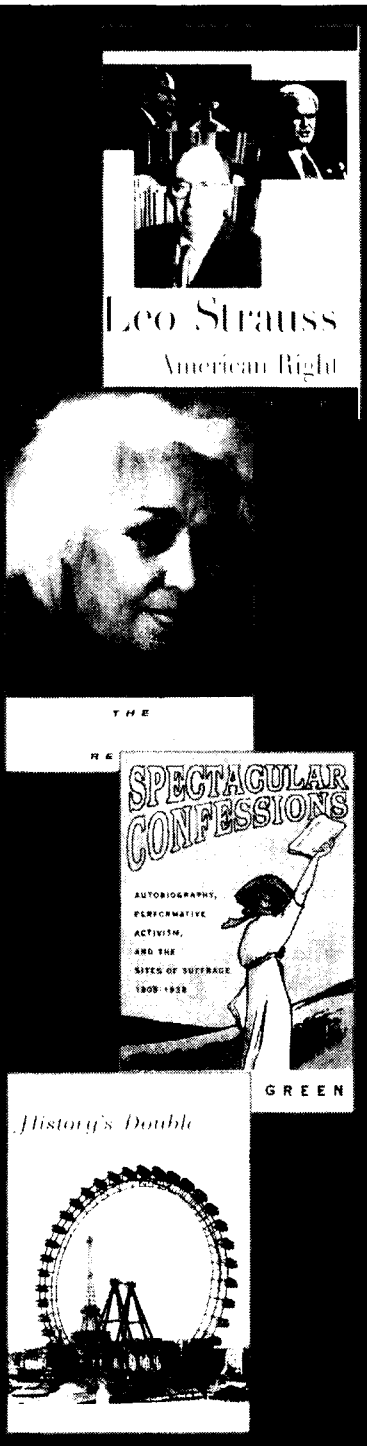

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A PIRATE'S

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PROGRESS

HOW THE MARITIME ROGUE BECAME A MULTICULTURAL HERO

BY **LAWRENCE OSBORNE**

CORBIS-BETTMANN, NORTH WIND PICTURE ARCHIVES

WHEN ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON began writing *Treasure Island* in 1881, he hardly could have imagined that he was creating one of the most pervasive icons of Western culture: the pirate. After all, he wrote the story merely to amuse his family during a rainy Scottish summer. Stevenson himself, for all his travels around the world, had never met or even seen a pirate, and all the tale's mythic elements—from the Black Spot to Spy-glass Hill to peg legs and parrots named Cap'n Flint—were wholly imaginary. The character of Long John Silver was based not on any real pirate but on Stevenson's friend, the eccentric (and landlubbing) editor W.E. Henley.

But the myth stuck, and in its wake came a veritable treasure chest of fictional pirate lore. Who can forget Errol Flynn as the charismatically maniacal Captain Thorpe? Or Douglas Fairbanks Sr. in *The Black Pirate*, shinning down a ship's sail as he slices it in half with his knife? From Captain Hook to the jolly rogues of Gilbert and Sullivan, the pirate has cast a long, exotically titillating shadow over Western childhood for more than one hundred years.

Now, historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists are looking at the rambunctious buccaneers in a new—and decidedly more serious—light. Were the dashing and dastardly icons of our cultural imagination really the monsters they have been portrayed to be? Or does a more complex reality lie just below the surface? Instead of being the biker gangs of the eighteenth century, were they in fact nascent democrats and socialists who shared their spoils, practiced free love, offered women exciting job opportunities, and treated blacks with dignity? At the very least, researchers are saying, it's time to make Long John Silver walk the plank and look at the actual maritime outlaw—not to mention the cruel mercantile system that produced him.

Indeed, the scholarly pendulum has swung in a rather romantic new direction: Some of today's revisionists laud pirates as proto-revolutionaries, heroic proletarian rebels fighting the brutal oppression of the emerging capitalist world order. One historian, Peter Linebaugh, calls pirates "seventeenth-century Soviets on water." Not everyone is convinced, however: Hugh Thomas, the author of *The Slave Trade* (1997), chuckles, "I would be most doubtful that pirates had *any* moral posture, much less philosophy!" Nonetheless, in an era when "outlaw" is increasingly seen as a synonym for "subversive," pirates are getting credit for

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FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: BLACKBEARD'S HEAD ON THE END OF THE BOWSPRIT; FEMALE PIRATE ANNE BONNY; ERROL FLYNN IN "THE SEA HAWK"; A DIG FOR TREASURES PRESUMED TO BE BURIED BY CAPTAIN KIDD.

everything from launching multiculturalism to—of all things—lighting the fires of the American Revolution.

Piracy, or robbery committed on the high seas, first flourished on the Atlantic following Hernán Cortés's conquest of Mexico in 1521. Centered mainly in the Caribbean and off the eastern seaboard of the United States, the bandits targeted gold and silver being transported from Spanish and Portuguese colonies back to the ports of Europe. Because nations like France and England were excluded by papal edict from this lucrative trade route, called the Spanish Main, they resorted to state-sponsored theft—or privateering—as a way of muscling in. Privateers were given licenses to plunder at will, sacking Spanish towns on the mainland and stealing treasure ships. During this era of government-backed aggression, most European privateers operating in the Caribbean were not only legal but considered national heroes. Hence, Sir Francis Drake attained his status as an English cult hero by netting the avaricious Queen Elizabeth the modern-day equivalent of a cool $100 million. (The queen faced down the fury of many a frustrated Spanish ambassador.) The brutal Welsh buccaneer Henry Morgan—who pillaged the town of Puerto Bello in 1668 and ravaged Panama three years later—was knighted for his efforts in 1674.

By the 1690s, however, many privateers had dropped all loyalty to anyone but themselves. Without the protection of a national flag, the bandits became full-fledged pirates. The spoils obtained by these freebooters became part of a clandestine trade often involving Colonial governors, plantation owners, and local Caribbean merchants. Using a wide variety of stolen and converted ships, pirates cast ripples of unease all over the Atlantic, threatening both slave and treasure ships en route from Africa to the Americas. They frequently took over the ships they stole, thus commanding forty-gun warships equal in size and firepower to second-rank ships of the official navies. Ships often changed hands several times: Blackbeard's *Queen Anne's Revenge*, for example, was originally a Dutch ship in French service called *Margaret*. With these means, the English-speaking pirates of the Caribbean based in the Bahamian island of Providence reached their zenith around 1710.

But in 1713, the Treaties of Utrecht granted the British even larger commercial interests in the Caribbean, and the Crown soon resolved to stamp out the pirates at all costs. Between 1717 and 1726, a fierce war was waged, with the result that the dreaded raiders' power was broken in the Atlantic. The massacre of Bartholomew Roberts and his crew by the British Royal Navy in 1722 is usually seen as the end of piracy's Atlantic heyday.

Clearly, piracy has a complicated and ever-changing complexion, and it is perhaps from this ambiguous history that the pirate's dual image as hero and villain derives. Seen as both free spirit and felon, the buccaneer enjoys the same love-hate relationship with our culture as the similarly folkloric bandits of the Wild West. The pirate is malleable and plastic: villain, rebel, seducer, barbarian, man of the people, idealist, and sadist. He is what we want him to be.

The current storm of interest in revising the pirate myth stems in part from a single archaeological discovery made thirteen years ago in the stormy waters off Wellfleet, Massachusetts, on Cape Cod Bay. There, a former high school history teacher named Barry Clifford had heard stories all his life about a mysterious ship called the *Whydah* that had gone down in a nor'easter in April 1717. It had belonged to the pirate Sam Bellamy—an enigmatic Englishman who rampaged around the West Indies between 1715 and 1717, capturing more than fifty ships. The *Whydah*, named for an African port, sank while the pirate was rushing back to New England to visit his girlfriend, the alleged witch Maria Hallett. (They were quite a pair.)

In 1978, Clifford began researching depositions made at the trials of some of Bellamy's crew. He determined to find the legendary ship, and in 1984, using electronic sensing equipment, he did so. The *Whydah* became the first authenticated pirate ship ever resurfaced.

The excavation of the ship has yielded more than 200,000 artifacts: a teapot with a piece of human shoulder bone wedged into it, Spanish silver coins, exquisite French pistols, and the oldest examples of West African Akan gold jewelry ever found. (Its holdings will be the subject of a National Geographic Society exhibition in Washington, D.C., next year.) But what made the *Whydah* so significant were the clues it began to reveal concerning the internal composition of what Clifford calls "pirate society." For many, it was assumed that pirates were ad hoc criminals of the usual sort, anarchic and rude. Yet the project historian, Kenneth Kinkor, began to notice details that did not fit the stereotype. In the first place, the Akan jewelry had been hacked apart with clear knife marks, which suggested that there had been an attempt to divide it equally. While this might strike us as a deplorable act of

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: NORTH WIND PICTURE ARCHIVES; CORBIS-BETTMANN; CULVER PICTURES; ARCHIVE PHOTOS

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FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: PORTRAIT OF ANNE BONNY BY WILLIAM GILKERSON; STILL FROM "THE BLACK PIRATE"; BLACKBEARD'S CREW CAROUSING ON THE COAST OF CAROLINA; DRAWING OF BLACKBEARD FROM 1724.

aesthetic vandalism, it does indicate, Clifford points out, that there was an "equitable system of distribution."

In the second place, eyewitness accounts of washed-up corpses revealed that many of the bodies on the shore after the sinking were black. Of Bellamy's crew of two hundred men, a full quarter were apparently of African descent. Kinkor became convinced that, although the *Whydah* had originally been an English slaver plying the coastal waters of West Africa, the blacks on board at the time of the ship's sinking were pirates, not captives. In the seventeenth century, he notes, blacks were "not tried as criminals when caught on pirate ships, it being assumed they were merely slaves." But by the eighteenth century, they were being tried alongside their white comrades—and being executed with them, too.

"Our image of pirates as overwhelmingly Anglo-Saxon began to disintegrate before my eyes," Kinkor reports. "Pirates judged Africans more on the basis of their language and sailing skills—in other words, on their level of cultural attainment—than on their race. That has to be unique for the white world of the early eighteenth century, to put it mildly." In fact, he goes on, blacks often became powerful quartermasters, even captains. One such, Laurens de Graff, stormed Vera Cruz in 1683 and was later made a minor French noble. Such stories, Kinkor claims, have "predictably" been ignored by historians. It is curious to think that just about the only place an armed black man could exist in the white world of the time was on the deck of a pirate ship.

But Kinkor goes much further in his guesswork. One retrieved pewter platter bears the Masonic compass-and-square symbol; based on this evidence, Kinkor speculates that Freemasonry was rife among pirates. Bellamy's fleet, he further asserts, was fully multinational and multiethnic. Dare one say, *multicultural?* The ship's crew shared no common language, no common religion, and recognized no government or laws. It was a "deviant subculture," Kinkor enthuses, a permanent social revolt at sea: "This is a proto-revolutionary movement. It manifests itself as criminality, but it is in fact the expression of social discontent. As the historian Eric Hobsbawm has put it, these are 'social bandits,' not random criminals. And what they have are floating democratic commonwealths. They even had what we would call workers' comp." (Contemporary sources, Kinkor explains, put the going rate for a lost leg at about £150.)

This notion of pirates as early socialists can, in fact, be traced to Hobsbawm's 1969 landmark book, *Bandits.* The distinguished Marxist historian argued that, in the transition from peasant economies to capitalism, there were winners and losers; in the lawless frontier zones of the late seventeenth century, the losers often took to banditry to survive. This was "social banditry," not criminality, and the social bandit quickly became a mythic, symbolic figure. Hobsbawm writes, "In a society in which men live by subservience, as ancillaries to machines of metal or moving parts of human machinery, the bandit lives and dies with a straight back." However, Hobsbawm was careful to point out that banditry was not a revolutionary activity, merely a desperate response to upheaval.

The leftist historian Christopher Hill applied Hobsbawm's sympathetic treatment of banditry to the open seas in his influential 1984 essay "Radical Pirates?" Following the collapse of the English Revolution in 1660, Hill argued, the West Indies—in particular, Barbados and Jamaica—were flooded with a "floating population" of "persecuted radicals" who eagerly signed up for the pirate life. These exiles, Hill suggested, "no doubt carried with them ideas which had originated in revolutionary England." In his book *Liberty Against the Law* (1996), Hill reiterated his belief that pirates were part of a "silenced vagabond class." The former peasantry, he argued, had either to enter the wage economy or roam the earth as highwaymen, pirates, or criminals: perpetual exiles created by bourgeois "law." Like the Diggers and Levellers of England, who responded politically to the same dispossession, pirates were fighting back against a cruel system of private property.

This view of the seventeenth-century criminal class has often been criticized as flimsy. One reviewer of Hill's book, Cambridge historian John Adamson, wrote in the *Sunday Telegraph:* "To travel with Dr. Hill through these pirate caves and smugglers' dens is to travel with Candide. All he sees is the good. His pirates and highwaymen belong to a Disney World where only bloodless banditry seems to take place."

PIRACY, KINKOR ENTHUSES, IS A "DEVIANT SUBCULTURE, A PROTO-REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT."

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: INDEPENDENCE SEAPORT MUSEUM, PHOTOFEST, NORTH WIND PICTURE ARCHIVES

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Nevertheless, younger scholars have generally followed the Hobsbawm-Hill line of argument and often taken it much further. Kinkor, for example, sees a clear piratical influence in American revolutionary movements. In his view, both phenomena were reactions to the same oppressive forces. "The notion," he says, "that both systems had checks and balances built into them is very interesting. One can't prove it, but it's intriguing."

One might object that the American rebels were far from being disenfranchised proles; rather, they were prosperous and well-educated middle-class merchants and gentlemen farmers with a tax grievance. Nevertheless, the notion that pirates were instrumental in fomenting American revolutionary sentiment has achieved a kind of academic liftoff. Indeed, it is now pointed out, a twelve-year-old Benjamin Franklin may have penned a well-known ditty about Blackbeard, which includes the freedom-loving couplet:

It's better to swim in the sea below
Than swing in the air to feed the crow.

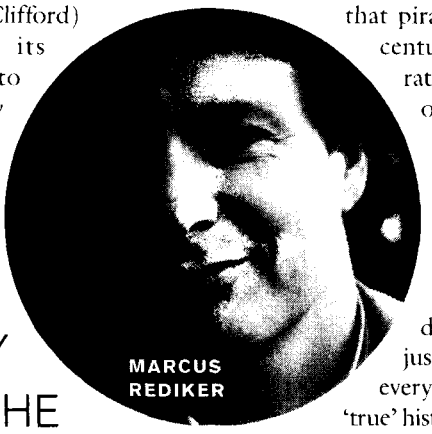
What, then, of this same Blackbeard? If Long John Silver is the fictional archetype of the pirate, then Blackbeard is the historical one. Famous for tying lighted cannon wicks into his hair as he plowed into battle and forcing captives to dine on their own ears, he was immortalized in film by Robert Newton in Raoul Walsh's 1952 *Blackbeard the Pirate*.

Blackbeard's real career, in fact, fully matched the Hollywood hyperbole. Starting out from Bristol, Edward Teach roved the waters off the eastern American seaboard piling up booty, eventually ending up in a notorious pirate community in the Bahamas. His blockade of Charleston in June 1718 was a national spectacle, after which he was pursued by the governor of Virginia, Alexander Spotswood. Blackbeard's last stand, in Ocracoke Inlet off the coast of North Carolina in 1718, is the stuff of pirate myth: During an epic battle on deck, the pirate was decapitated and his head hung from the bows of the British man-of-war. Legend has it that the headless corpse swam around the ship several times before sinking.

In November 1996, the Florida salvaging company Intersal claimed to have discovered the remains of Blackbeard's flagship, the *Queen Anne's Revenge*, near the resort of Beaufort, North Carolina. It is only the second pirate marine archaeological site ever to be uncovered.

Intersal's director, Phil Masters, at once proclaimed it "the most important underwater archaeological site ever found in the New World," and a media blitz accompanied the painstaking recovery of an odd assortment of barnacled objects: a bronze bell dated 1709, glass shards from gin bottles, and thirteen enormous cannons.

Although some pirate scholars (including Barry Clifford) cast doubts on its authenticity due to the lack of any clearly identifying artifacts, state authorities at once pounced on the *Queen Anne's Revenge* as a sensational addition to the coast's tourist profile. (They point out that the retrieved ship's size and location closely matches eyewitness accounts from the period.) A new multimillion-dollar museum is being planned by the North Carolina Maritime Museum to house the artifacts, politicians ecstatically foresee Blackbeard motels and restaurants sprouting up like mushrooms, and a mock cannon battle known as Blackbeard's Bounty Festival has been staged—all of this predicated on folklore that historians are actively trying to demolish.


MARCUS REDIKER

REDIKER OBSERVES THAT DELACROIX'S REVOLUTIONARY PAINTING "LIBERTY LEADING THE PEOPLE" IS STRIKINGLY SIMILAR TO AN ENGRAVING OF THE NOTORIOUS FEMALE PIRATE ANNE BONNY.

Was Blackbeard's fearsome reputation more hype than substance? David Moore, who runs the conservation facility at the North Carolina Maritime Museum, insists that Blackbeard was hardly the killer of popular legend. "I think it was all bluff," he says. In Moore's opinion, the pirate's most famous exploit—the Charleston blockade—had as its objective obtaining medicines for a crew probably suffering from syphilis. "There's no document," Moore adds, "which shows that Blackbeard killed *anyone* except in the final battle, and even in that case, you could argue it was in self-defense." Yet Moore cautions that archaeology by itself can only furnish tantalizing hints as to the exact nature of pirate societies.

The Beaufort excavation may prove that our hardy sea wolves downed many a pint of gin, and the *Whydah* may show that the odd crew member was a closet Freemason. But will they ever prove that pirates were seventeenth-century iconoclasts, democrats and free spirits instead of the rampaging churls in ruffs we have all come to love? James Delgado, executive director of the Vancouver Maritime Museum, explains the dilemma: "We're demythologizing pirates just as we're deconstructing everything else. But there is no 'true' history, only interpretations. You could see them as criminals; you also could see them as rebels against the iniquitous mercantile system of their time." Delgado pauses. "How you see pirates, I suspect, is dependent very much on your ideology. Piracy may be the oldest trade after prostitution, but it remains the most mysterious historically. There are hardly any real artifacts to go on. One has to reconstruct it."

Two great studies of Caribbean piracy dominate the early scholarship: A.O. Exquemelin's *De Americaensche Zee-Roovers* (1678) and Captain Charles Johnson's *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pyrates* (1724), a text filled with firsthand accounts of pirate

ARTHUR W. WANG

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LEFT: ENGRAVING OF ANNE BONNY; RIGHT: DETAIL FROM EUGENE DELACROIX'S "LIBERTY LEADING THE PEOPLE" (1831)

ships written by an enigmatic author about whom almost nothing is known. Both did much to bolster government propaganda of the time by portraying the "sea-dogs" as inveterate rogues. Johnson, for example, more or less sums up the official line: "Thus we see what a disastrous Fate, ever attends the Wicked, and how rarely they escape the Punishment due to their Crimes, who abandon themselves to such a profligate Life, as to rob, spoil, and prey upon Mankind." Exquemelin describes many forms of spine-chilling torture used by pirates. Of one particularly unsavory incident, the Dutch chronicler writes: "Others had burning matches placed twisted about their fingers, which were thus burned alive. Others had slender cords or matches betwixt their heads, till their eyes burst out of the skull."

Such horror stories do, in fact, have some basis in reality. For example, British naval historian David Cordingly writes in *Under the Black Flag* (1995) that the ferocious French pirate Montbars Languedoc would rip out the intestines of his victims, nail one end to a post, and then force the victim to dance away while his backside was pounded with a burning log.

But, Cordingly points out, it is unfair to single out pirates for egregious acts of violence. "While the catalog of pirate cruelties is endless," he writes, "it needs to be put into perspective. Pirates were not the only people guilty of violence and atrocities. Life for the common sailor in the merchant navy could be a living hell if he found himself on board a ship run by a captain who took a delight in bullying his men." Cruelty by captains against crewmen was, Cordingly argues, routine and savage. The sadistic Captain Haskins, for example, was known for beating men with a marlinespike; the records of the High Court of Admiralty are filled with tales of captains lashing men to mizzenmasts and leaving them to die. Cordingly rather dramatically compares many ships to Inquisitional dungeons. "It is usual nowadays to regard a sailing ship as a thing of beauty," he writes, "but it could be turned into a torture chamber by a sadistic captain. There were boat hooks and brooms and iron bars to beat men with. There were axes and hammers and cutlasses to cause grievous wounds. There were ropes of all sizes that could be used to whip, strangle, and stretch bodies and limbs." While this might sound like a tantalizing advertisement for an S/M lair, Cordingly's baroque descriptions serve to make the point that accounts of pirate violence are themselves a smoke screen for a greater kind of violence.

In other words, the violence of pirates is a reflection of the violence of an inhumane System—not of their own free-floating society. Following this line of argument, University of Pittsburgh historian Marcus Rediker, in a book called *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (1987), paints a chilling picture of pirates as the Great Oppressed. Rediker's thesis is that Caribbean piracy shows a slow evolution that clearly reveals its underpinnings in social unrest. In his view, pirates were originally "free-wage laborers... members of an uncontrolled, freewheeling subculture which gave pirates the perspective and occasion to fight back against brutal and unjust authority and to construct a new social order where King Death would not reign supreme." Following Britain's gains after the War of the Spanish Succession ended in 1713, Rediker argues, pirates became proletarian outcasts and miscreants. Like witches, mendicants, slaves, indentured servants, and maroons, pirates had to be forced into legitimate labor markets—and once the remaining pirate ships became what we would now call worker-controlled cooperatives, says Rediker, the imperial states began hanging people *pour encourager les autres.*

"I think these ships provoked the fear of a good example," Rediker says. "They were multiethnic, which must have horrified the imperial powers in the Caribbean. Pirates subverted everything in the status quo. We know that they deliberately targeted abusive captains, and that they did propose an alternative society, which must have seemed glamorously utopian to ordinary people. There was a clearly counter-cultural air about them." It is worth recalling, indeed, that the pirate Philip Lyne confessed to having killed thirty-seven captains—class war in extremis.

Then again, wasn't law and order simply following the rolling back of a frontier, as it usually does? "Well, it's clearly not as simple as that," Rediker says. Nor does he find it hyperbolic to claim that pirates had a deep influence on Colonial American antiauthoritarianism. After all, weren't they always crying "Curse the King and the Higher Powers"?

Rediker shares Kinkor's vision of pirates as nautical Paul Reveres. "On the level of oral history, of hidden ideas, I think pirates had a powerful effect on the Americas," he argues. "Popular English radicalism of the seventeenth century may well have been carried around the world by pirates. Some of the American

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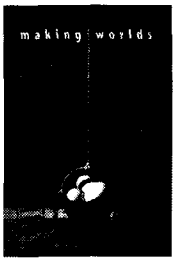
Making Worlds

Gender, Metaphor, Materiality



Edited by SUSAN HARDY AIKEN, ANN BRIGHAM, SALLIE A. MARSTON, and PENNY WATERSTONE

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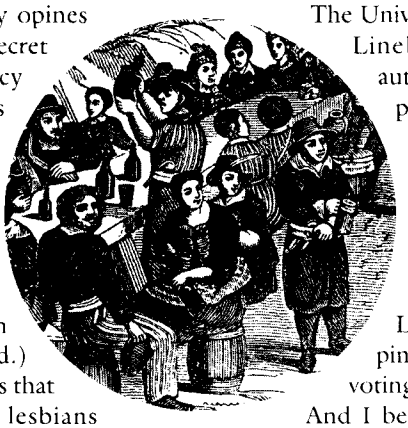
sailors captured by the British during the Revolutionary War organized themselves in prison exactly like on pirate ships!" In the same spirit, Rediker pointedly observes, the bare-breasted figure of Liberty in Delacroix's famous revolutionary 1831 painting *Liberty Leading the People* is strikingly similar to an engraving of the notorious female pirate Anne Bonny, who was typically depicted with her breasts bared.

Rediker's work, a dramatic extension of Hobsbawm's critique, has stirred to life a rash of feminist, Marxist, and gay studies of what many now call the "international nautical proletariat." In 1995, the self-described "radical cultural worker" Jo Stanley brought out *Bold in Her Breeches*, a study of women pirates with chapter titles like "Criminals, Communards or Crumpets?" and "Brigand Dominatrices for Utopia-Seeking Masochists." Attempting to tell the subterranean story of female cross-dressers in a "patriarchal" world, Stanley opines that women have a secret history within piracy almost as enigmatic as piracy itself—even if only ten bona fide female pirates have been identified. (Two ships, ten women: Lack of evidence has never been a barrier in this field.) Stanley even suggests that piracy appealed to lesbians wishing to flee "family surveillance." She concludes, "Women pirates were part of a category of unruly characters including highwaywomen, murderers, and prostitutes seen as in need of control and punishment for their non-conformity."



But there is clearly unease in this feminist vision of pirates. On one page, we are shown a picture of Blackbeard's vessels "carousing on the coast of Carolina." But, cries the caption, is this "community celebration or a sentimentalized eighteenth-century orgy?" One cannot tell. Clearly, women as molls, sex toys, and pirate prostitutes makes for a less rousing revision. (And the specter of rape, one suspects, is never far from the horizon.) Were rapists, too, heroically resistant "non-conformists"?

Arizona State historian B.R. Burg, in *Sodomy and the Pirate Tradition* (1984), brings the same revisionist spirit to piratical homosexuality. In the book, he boldly but airily asserts an "almost universal homosexual involvement among pirates" and speculates as to the myriad forms of on-deck masturbation and all-male transgressive bonding on the high seas—giving surprising new meanings, one supposes, to those tired old refrains of "fifteen men on a dead man's chest." Burg portrays pirate ships as veritable paradises for homosexuals, claiming at one point that "the lack of persecution and the ease of making homosexual contacts probably eliminated the need for social centers similar to modern-day gay bars, coffee houses, bathouses, or bookstores."

As for Rediker, he's hardly uttered his last word on the subject. He's currently co-writing *The Many-Headed Hydra*, which proposes a new term, "hydrarchy," to characterize what he calls "the uniquely free-floating social dynamics of pirate culture."

The University of Toledo's Peter Linebaugh, Rediker's co-author, describes pirates as part of an "international vagabond class" and calls their violence "resistance" to an imperial ruling class. "Pirates were much more political than we are," Linebaugh avers, "popping as we do into a little voting booth every four years. And I believe their human creations have left a legacy in the Caribbean: multiethnicity, for example, or the creole languages." In an earlier book, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (1991), Linebaugh suggested that the sea was a place where the dispossessed could strike back and appropriate some of the wealth of the thieving capitalists. At a time when Britain's annual import-export trade amounted to £14.5 million, he claimed, the average seaman was making just 30 shillings a month. Buccaneers, he gushes, represent "a living continuum of resistance. Most historians have scorned them, but I see them as one variation of the International, as a part of an ongoing story or struggle. I see them in the context of 1789, of 1848, the Revolution of 1905.

NORTH WIND PICTURE ARCHIVES

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THE NOTION OF THE PIRATE AS AN AQUATIC ROBIN HOOD IS ROOTED IN THE VERY SAME BLOOD-SOAKED TEXTS THE REVISIONISTS ARE SO ANXIOUS TO REPUDIATE.

It's the same 'hydra' of the dispossessed. They have been the victims of the ruling class along with all the other oppressed groups, whether they be the Irish, slaves, women, or landless peasants."

One might ask whether such revision is being made in the service of a romanticism curiously akin to the Victorian iconography to which it so vociferously objects. Among the most famous pirate paintings, for example, is Howard Pyle's *So the Treasure Was Divided*, which shows a crew doling out its booty on a "democratic" basis. One could argue, indeed, that the myth of pirates as hearty, egalitarian musketeers is part of this very same iconography. For as it turns out, the notion of the pirate as an aquatic Robin Hood is rooted in the very same blood-soaked texts that revisionists are apparently so anxious to repudiate.

In Captain Johnson's *History*, for example, we find a complete rendition of the "Ten Articles" that supposedly regulated the pirate ships—from "Every man has a Vote in Affairs of Moment" to "Equal title to the fresh Provisions." Gambling was forbidden, and duels on land were to replace unseemly squabbles on deck. Article IX tells us that every man was obliged to stay in the company until each had made $1,000 profit. Lights were put out at eight—and each pirate had to keep his cutlass clean.

While Johnson gives us a bloodcurdling picture of real pirates like Blackbeard, he also offers up the legendary figure of Misson, a democratic pirate leader who supposedly founded a utopian society called Libertalia on Madagascar. Johnson's Libertalia is clearly derived from Thomas More's *Utopia* and—as Rediker points out in a 1996 essay—heavily borrows from medieval and folkloric utopias such as the mythic "Land of Cockaygne," where workers and peasants enjoy a life of plenty. According to Johnson, the pirates there are "vigilant Guardians of the People's Rights and Liberties." They "look'd upon a Democratical Form." Rediker feels stirred to add that Misson's followers were "anti-capitalist, opposed to the dispossession that necessarily accompanied the historic ascent of wage labor and capitalism."

But Johnson says no such thing. Misson's objections to tyranny and monarchy have little in them specific to what we now call capitalism; they are more appropriately seen as applied to all forms of despotism and deprivation.

Besides, pirates cannot be said to have been indifferent to either money or prop-

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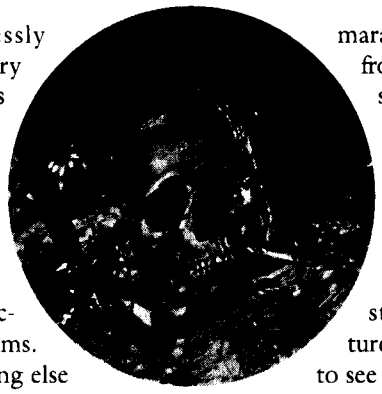
erty. For wasn't the lusty acquisition of both their primary interest?

Another problem with Rediker's argument is that, as scholars attest, Misson himself is clearly fictitious. Rediker gets around this by some deft insinuations: "But was it a fiction? Since a man named Misson and a place named Libertalia apparently never existed, the literal answer must be yes. But in a deeper historical and political sense Misson and Libertalia were not just simply fictions.... Libertalia was a literary expression of the living traditions, practices, and dreams of an Atlantic working class." Yet Misson's sentiments are just as likely to be those of Johnson himself. It is simply impossible to say.

Rediker breathlessly claims that in this literary myth we see how sailors "in practice created a counterculture to the dominant ways of organizing maritime life and labor." But do we? Utopias are not transcriptions of actual practices but perennial dreams. To read them as anything else is surely misleading. And when all is said and done, a ship is not a "society." Blackbeard's ship, when it was captured, yielded less than two dozen men—hardly a commonwealth. A society is not a



marauding vessel roaming from port to port and consisting of a few dozen men (and almost no women) in search of doubloons and spare parts—any more than the eternal clichés of utopian literature constitute a "counterculture." It is merely tempting to see them as such.

In the end, we'll never know what pirates themselves read into their various articles and constitutions nor what subterranean influence they ever had on terra firma's kingdoms. University of York historian Simon Smith thinks that piracy may well have been motivated by some sort of political rebellion against the ancien régime, and that, as outcasts, pirates had to organize to survive. "I think they do raise questions about what a contract is, what an institution is, and so forth," he muses. "On the other hand, their connection to revolutionary ideology is pure speculation. We'll never know exactly what their political and social influence really was or whether they had any opinions on those matters at all." Simon concludes that today's pirate revisionism is more a commentary on ourselves than on the pirates themselves. "A lot of labor history went sort of underground with the collapse of communism and has just resurfaced in some odd places," he laughs. "We like to look back and rewrite the histories of the marginalized."

As for the pirates themselves, one wonders what they might have thought about being aligned with Soviets, the International, and workers' comp. Can we imagine Long John Silver crying, "Up the workers, laddie!" or Captain Hook signing a Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen with his metal appendage? Rather, they may well have simply wondered how much loot there was for them and, after getting a disappointing answer, gone back to the *Jolly Roger*, buried treasure, and loud refrains of "Yo ho ho and a bottle of rum!"

Lawrence Osborne is the author of *Paris Dreambook* and *The Poisoned Embrace*, both published by Vintage. His article, "The Women Warriors," appeared in the December/January 1998 issue.

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Arthur R. Jensen

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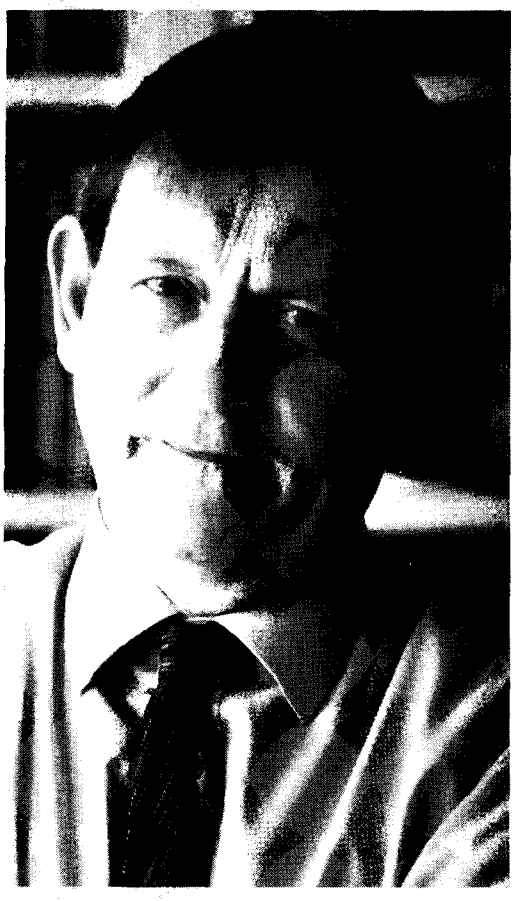

IS NORMAN DAVIES INNOCENT?

BY **JONATHAN MAHLER**

THE SUMMER OF 1994 WASN'T AN EASY one for Norman Davies. The festivities surrounding the fiftieth anniversary of the Allied invasion of Normandy left him feeling out of sorts. All of the fuss accorded to the western front of World War II, Davies feared, would only obscure the war's less happy ending in the East. He decided to weigh in with his own take on the matter. In a cover story for *The New York Review of Books,* "The Misunderstood Victory in Europe," he assailed politicians, pundits, and fellow historians alike for neglecting Eastern Europe's role in the war. The true heart of the conflict, Davies wrote, was east of the German border, where Hitler and Stalin acted out their mortal rivalry. "Selective memories cannot be avoided," he concluded, "but they can be counteracted."

If the *New York Review* essay marked Davies's first stab at counteraction, his massive new book, *Europe: A History,* represents a full-fledged campaign. Yet even for someone who has actively courted the role of provocateur throughout his career, the intellectual heat generated by *Europe* came as a surprise. After all, a 1,365-page survey of European history (brought out by Oxford University Press, no less) hardly seems likely to stir much interest outside the academy, let alone provoke an international furor. In the sixteen months since its arrival in bookstores, though, *Europe* has sold more than 100,000 copies, even as the fog of controversy around it continues to thicken.

First came the adulation. *The Times Literary Supplement* called the book "a tremendous achievement before which one must stand in admiration, if not awe." *The New Statesman* cooed, "I doubt whether anyone in this generation will produce a more eloquent history of this continent." The *London Review of Books* stated simply that "it will never be possible to write a history of Europe in the old way again." The book shot straight up the best-seller list in England, prompting one British magazine to commission a first-person piece from Davies headlined HOW I CONQUERED EUROPE.

On this side of the Atlantic, however, a dramatically different view of the book—and its author—has emerged. Davies has been accused of exhibiting an almost pathological sloppiness. (One reviewer complained he found an average of one glaring factual error every other page.) More seriously, perhaps, Davies has been charged with harboring ideological biases—including a tendency to downplay Polish anti-Semitism—that not only disqualify *Europe* as responsible history but in fact transform the book into a political weapon. Writing in *The New York Times Book Review,* Princeton historian Theodore Rabb dubbed the book "mean spirited," "self-indulgent," and "unbalanced." And in a bitter six-page attack in *The New Republic,* New York University's Tony Judt labeled it "truly unsavory" and "politically motivated." Judt, who is British, went so far as to excoriate London's intellectual Establishment for its cowardly unwillingness to take Davies to task for what he called a "propaganda exercise on behalf of eastern applicants to the E.U."

What manner of book has prompted all these strong opinions? Weighing in at just shy of four and a half pounds, *Europe* spans the five million years from the physical formation of the European peninsula to the collapse of communism in 1991. Yet Davies's goal was not merely to write a "total history of all Europe in every period," as the book's jacket audaciously declares; it was to shift the continent's center of gravity away from Western Europe. Or, to use the author's own rather dark formulation, to contest the "Allied Scheme of History," which, he says, divides Europe all too neatly into eastern and western spheres, reduces World War II to Manichaean terms, and gives Stalin a free ride, at least relative to its treatment of Hitler. According to Davies, the Allied Scheme is in fact a symptom of a larger tendency to underrate the importance of Eastern Europe—and Poland in particular—vis-à-vis the entire history of the continent.

With Poland and the rest of Eastern Europe emerging from the long shadow

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of communism and democracy beginning to take hold in many of these countries, the timing couldn't be better for this kind of post–Cold War revision of European history. To his critics, though, Davies has gone too far in his attempt to restore the balance. Along the way, they charge, he has deliberately ignored and distorted key facts, effectively razing the wall that divides scholarship from partisanship.

DAVIES NOW lives on the outskirts of Oxford, only a few miles from the train station where he picked me up for our first interview on a blustery November afternoon. With his bushy hair, casual slacks, open shirt, and black nylon jacket, he was hardly the picture of a distinguished historian, or even a typical Oxford denizen. Our plan was to eat a leisurely lunch and, weather permitting, venture into the countryside for an afternoon walk.

Davies does not teach at Oxford. In fact, he no longer teaches at all. In the summer of 1996, at the age of fifty-seven, he retired from the University of London's School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies to devote more time to writing. He did attend Oxford as an undergraduate, after a hardscrabble youth in a working-class district of Lancashire, in England's bleak industrial north. While there, he gravitated toward A.J.P. Taylor, an iconoclastic populist historian who was himself no stranger to controversy. (Taylor's most debated work, *The Origins of the Second World War,* treated Hitler's foreign policy in the 1930s as that of a conventional European statesman.) Like Taylor, Davies is known for his snappy prose—something even his detractors allow—as well as his often epigrammatic judgments. It was Taylor, in fact, who wrote the preface to Davies's first book, a history of the Polish-Soviet war of 1920 titled *White Eagle, Red Star* (1972).

But for all their similarities in style, Davies was troubled by his mentor's unsympathetic view of Eastern Europe. "I have great admiration and great reservations about him at the same time," reflects Davies, remarking that Taylor had some conventional prejudices toward small nations. For instance, Davies notes, "Taylor would have been horrified at breaking up a large country like the Soviet Union into a number of small countries." On this point, teacher and student couldn't be further apart. Davies calls the Soviet Union "uniquely mean and mendacious."

Shortly after we pulled into a quiet pub in the wooded countryside surrounding Oxford, Davies confided to me: "I still boil when I hear people talk about the liberation of Europe. It's true that the survivors in the Nazi concentration camps were liberated, but most of those camps were refilled by a new wave of Eastern European prisoners who didn't suit the incoming Soviet soldiers."

WOODCUT OF CRACOW BY SCHEDEL OF NURNBERG

The story of his first wife's family hammered home these sentiments for Davies. As an educated Roman Catholic Pole, his father-in-law, a professor of biology, was among those rounded up and sent to Dachau by the Nazis in 1939. Meanwhile, Davies's future wife and mother-in-law were driven into their cellar by the SS, who proceeded to take up residence in their home. The father somehow managed to survive the war, but no sooner had he returned home to Poland than the Red Army rolled through town. He was arrested again, this time by the Soviet police, the NKVD, who suspected him of cooperating with the non-Communist Polish underground. The father was tortured on the very same table in the local police station where Hitler's henchmen had bloodied him six years earlier. "Churchill said that he was willing to make a pact with the devil in order to defeat Hitler," says Davies, the pitch of his voice rising in indignation, "and he did make a pact with the devil, not just with some undesirable character."

The demonization of Germany and overindulgence of Russia is, according to Davies, a common theme in postwar European scholarship. Blame the Allied Scheme, which paints the war in black and white—"the goodies versus the baddies"—and skates right over the fact that our principal ally in the war, Joseph Stalin, may well have been the greatest monster of the twentieth century.

This perspective is heartily welcomed by like-minded anticommunists. "The Allied Scheme is something that anybody who has spent any time thinking or writing about Eastern Europe immediately understands," says Anne Applebaum, a journalist and author in London who is now writing a book on the Soviet gulags. Lithuanians, for example, remember World War II not as Hitler's war but as a series of invasions beginning and ending with the Russians. "When people look back on twentieth-century European history, they will see two evils that I think were different sides of the same coin," Applebaum predicts.

Despite Davies's dark view of the Soviet Union, he actually chose to study in the Eastern bloc, earning his Ph.D. from Cracow's Jagiellonian University in 1974. He had initially submitted his dissertation, which focused on the Polish-Soviet war, to Oxford, but his examination was halted in the middle, when one of the examiners complained that his translations of Polish texts were not up to snuff. Davies protested, and after a lengthy

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THOUGH HARDLY A DEMOCRACY IN MODERN TERMS, EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY POLAND HAD THE LARGEST ELECTORATE IN EUROPE.

inquiry into his case, a new exam was scheduled for the following year. But by then he had grown frustrated enough to take his thesis to Poland, where it had to be camouflaged as a study of Anglo-Polish relations in order to get through the communist censors. "Anyone can disagree with what I say, but I wasn't going to have anybody telling me that my knowledge of Polish was insufficient," he fumes.

Davies's decision to finish his dissertation in Poland was less capricious than it might seem. He had first visited the country almost by accident, in 1962, just after completing his bachelor's degree in history. He was still enrolled at Oxford and was working on the equivalent of a master's in education there when he signed up to visit the Soviet Union with a group of instructors-in-training. After purchasing their tickets, the students were denied visas to Russia and had to settle for the Soviet frontier instead. ("I have the Soviet consulate to thank for my interest in Poland," Davies quips.) On their way to Warsaw, they stopped in East Germany, where they were warned by a government official to watch out for the "savage" Poles. "But then when we got to Warsaw," Davies remembers, "there were all of these pretty girls and very normal people who took us to a jazz club, and I suddenly thought, Well, the world isn't quite as these guys are painting it."

From Warsaw, Davies and his group moved on to Cracow, where they ventured to the suburbs to visit what was billed as the showpiece of the new communist world, a gigantic steel mill, complete with housing and facilities for its workers and the obligatory statue of Lenin. Absent, of course, was any house of worship. The local workers had managed to put up a wooden cross on the spot where they hoped to build a church. Davies asked the tour guide to take his group to the cross, but when they arrived, they found it had already been removed by the authorities. When they asked the guide why she had bothered bringing them there when the cross was already gone, she looked surprised. "Can't you imagine it?" she responded.

This was Davies's first encounter with Polish resilience. "You might live in a world where things weren't exactly as you wanted them to be, but you live internally and tolerate the world as it is," he observes. "That's why Poland turned out to be unconquerable by communist ideology. People just ignored it and went on as if it didn't exist."

Eventually, a church was built on the site of the cross—and Davies became one of the world's leading historians of Poland. His second book, a two-volume survey titled *God's Playground: A History of Poland*, was the first such effort attempted by a British or American historian since 1918. When the book was brought out by Oxford University Press in 1981, it stood no chance of being released in communist Poland. Seven years later, however, the country's minister of culture gave the necessary approval: The first volume could be published in Poland—provided that Davies agreed to sign an agreement never to publish volume two there. Davies conceded and volume one became available in Poland (minus several passages describing the letters that a sixteenth-century Russian exile to Poland wrote home condemning the autocracy of Russia and singing the praises of his adopted nation). The following year, Poland threw off its communist shackles, enabling Davies to bring out volume two. Today, *God's Playground* is a fixture in bookstores throughout Poland, as well as the principal history text for the country's students.

IF DAVIES writes Polish history with a near-missionary zeal, it's partly because he considers it a country desperately in need of attention. While a visiting professor at Stanford in 1985, he recalls sketching a map of sixteenth-century Poland and taping it to his office door. A number of distinguished professors strolled by and—puzzled by the country's expansive borders—asked Davies if the map was some sort of joke. To the extent that Polish history has been presented in the West, Davies says, the perspective has been distinctly Western. "I remember at school the only topic I was ever taught about Polish history was the partition of Poland, which was studied exclusively from the point of view of [the Prussian king] Frederick the Great, who was rather a nasty piece of work," he remarks. "But what these wretched Poles actually thought about their country being destroyed nobody knew."

Once the largest state in Europe, not to mention a tolerant, even multicultural society, Poland since the beginning of the nineteenth century has been a story of economic backwardness, political subservience, and ethnic strife. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, Poland's parliament was elected by roughly 10 percent of the population. Though hardly a democracy in modern terms, the country had the largest electorate in Europe. (By contrast, voting rights in England extended to less than 2 percent of the population.)

The big turning point in Poland's history came in 1795, when Russia, Prussia, and Austria effected the final stage of the Poland-Lithuania partition. It was, as Davies points out, the largest nonviolent territorial redistribution of its era in Europe. There is no question that Poland was the victim; there is, however, considerable disagreement over how to interpret the partition—or more to the point, to what extent Poland can be blamed for its own demise. On the one hand, the partition can be seen as the simple result of the imperiousness—and superior armed forces—of Poland's enemies. On the other hand, the Polish political system was so defective by the latter half of the eighteenth century that the country might well have imploded had it not first been overrun.

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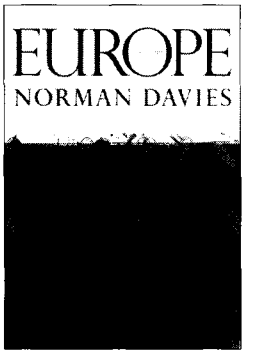
Among its governmental peculiarities was the so-called liberum veto, an ultra-democratic device that allowed any member of parliament to veto any act of legislation. The Polish monarchy was effectively impotent; it was unable, for instance, to maintain a proper army or to impose taxes on the Polish people. Consequently, a modern state just couldn't take hold. At the same time, there was a deep, even unbridgeable, gulf between Poland's nobility and the largely rural masses who lived, effectively, as serfs.

Predictably, Davies offers an unambiguous reading of the partition, one that gives the benefit of the doubt to the Polish commonwealth. As usual, it was Russia—with the consent of Prussia and Austria—exerting itself over a defenseless Poland. "Many contemporary observers, thankful for the avoidance of war, were conditioned to accept the partitioners' explanations," he writes in *Europe,* noting that it took "a Burke, a Michelet, or a Macaulay to call a crime a crime." The partitions themselves, Davies continues, were carried out by "gangsterish methods, where the unwritten threat of violence underlay all of the formal agreements and where the victims were forced to condone their own mutilation."

To his critics, Davies's treatment of the partition is characteristically one-dimensional. He neglects, for instance, to highlight the Polish nobility's haughty resistance to reform, an attitude that played right into the hands of its partitioners. Davies is unswayed by such arguments. "I have a rather dangerous tendency to support the underdog," he says, grinning. "Whereas most historians talk about the rise of powers, my interest in Poland was exactly the opposite: It was a country that was not known about, for whom there was very little sympathy, very little knowledge, and yet it was a large, tragic story."

WITH *Europe,* Davies sought to write a sweeping history of a continent. One of his main goals was to restore the old-fashioned narrative to history writing; the book's emphasis is clearly on storytelling, which Davies does gracefully and with a natural eye for detail. Yet at the same time, *Europe* is a quirky work filled with highly personal touches and seemingly arcane tidbits. Sprinkled liberally throughout the book, for example, are "capsules," or boxed passages of a page or two on subjects ranging from Albert Einstein to the condom. Each of *Europe*'s twelve chapters ends with a "snapshot," where the narrative stops at a symbolic time and place and Davies describes an event—and its historical context—in considerable, if gratuitous detail.

Of all the book's idiosyncrasies, however, its emphasis on Poland is easily the most obtrusive. Describing the D-Day invasion, for instance, Davies writes: "In the West, the Second Front was finally opened on 6 June 1944, when British, Canadian, Polish and American troops landed on the beaches of Normandy." His handling of the Cold War is equally curious. Davies cites the inability of the Allies to come to an agreement on the government of Poland as a key factor in the U.S.-Soviet split. As for the conclusion of the Cold War, he credits the Poles with "bringing the Soviet bloc to its knees." Such interpretations provide easy fodder for those who argue that Davies is not rethinking Europe as a whole but rather writing what might be called compensatory history. Or, put another way, his answer to an ideological reading of history is itself ideological. "In 1944, 1945, and 1946, no one cared about Eastern Europe except the Eastern Europeans; everyone cared about Germany," says Tony Judt. "That may be a terrible thing to say, but it's not bad history."



Still, exaggerating Poland's role in European history is a minor offense compared with a related charge that has been leveled at Davies over the years—namely, that in his zeal to restore to the country its due he winds up making excuses for Polish anti-Semitism. His most vocal critic on this count has been the independent scholar and journalist Abraham Brumberg, who rarely misses an opportunity to scribble a letter to the editor attacking Davies. "His pro-Polishness is almost neurotic," says Brumberg, who was raised in Poland. "It is not rational. It is not a sense of justice or fairness about the way Poland has been treated by history."

To be sure, writing about Polish-Jewish relations both during and after the war is a minefield. Misconceptions abound—both among Poles who think that all Jews were communists and among Jews who consider anti-Semitism endemic to Polish culture. "No issue in Holocaust literature is more burdened by misunderstanding, mendacity, and sheer racial prejudice than that of Polish-Jewish relations during World War II," observed Istvan Deak, a professor of European history at Columbia University, in a recent issue of *The New York Review of Books.* Indeed, in the winter of 1996, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) ran into trouble when it tried to rescind an award for a book—*Did the Children Cry? Hitler's War Against Polish and Jewish Children, 1939–1945*—which suggested that Polish children were as much the victims of Nazi terror as Jewish children. After further review, the ADL concluded that the book's author, Richard Lukas, had committed interpretive and factual errors in order to counter negative assessments of the Polish treatment of Jews during the war. Lukas, considerably aggrieved, was unwilling to give up the honor. And after consulting with his attorneys, the ADL decided to go ahead with the prize—but canceled the accompanying ceremony.

For his part, Davies was almost disarmingly forthcoming with me—a Jewish writer who works on the *Forward,* a Jewish newspaper (albeit one with a history of staunch anticommunism)—when the conversation turned to the Jewish question. I had expected the same sort of defensive posturing that I've encountered in the past when interviewing people accused of similar offenses. What I got instead was a man who made no apologies for his devotion to a cause. "As a historian of Poland, the one thing you're always vulnerable to is 'He's anti-Semitic, he stands up for these wretched Poles who persecute Jews,'" he said. "But they say that without knowing anything about Poland." Davies pointed out, quite correctly, that Warsaw had no Jewish ghettos before the war and that the largest single contingent of "righteous Gentiles" (Gentiles who helped save Jews during the Holocaust) were Poles. Moreover, he continued, Hitler's aggression was hardly limited to Poland's Jews: "At the very time when the Germans were clearing the ghettos, the

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DAVIES CONTESTS THE "ALLIED SCHEME OF HISTORY," WHICH, HE SAYS, REDUCES WORLD WAR II TO MANICHAEAN TERMS, AND GIVES STALIN A FREE RIDE.

SS took all of the Catholic population whom they suspected of supporting the Resistance and put them all in a big pit and buried them alive. Is there any echo of that in Spielberg?"

In his written work, Davies has addressed these issues more provocatively. In *Europe*, for example, Davies juxtaposes examples of Nazi atrocities with presumably comparable historical events. A "capsule" in chapter 11 on the roundup and shooting of fifteen hundred men, women, and children in the town of Otwock by Germany's infamous Reserve Police Battalion 101 mutates into a discussion of what he calls the "heinous crimes" performed by the "disproportionate number of Jews" in Poland's postwar communist security forces. Understandably, this comparison raised eyebrows among many readers, as did a separate passage in which Davies juxtaposes the French Republic's mass drowning of Vendée rebels in 1794 with the Germans' use of Zyklon-B during the Holocaust. This time, Davies went a step further. "A view might be entertained that the Nazi gas-chambers reflected a 'humanitarian approach,' akin to that of well-regulated abattoirs," he wrote. "If the inmates had to die it was better that they die quickly rather than in protracted agony or from cold and starvation. In practice, there is ample evidence that the operation of the Nazi death-camps was accompanied by gratuitous bestiality."

Adding to the perception that Davies is less than sensitive when it comes to the Jewish question was his use of two rather suspect sources: the notorious Holocaust revisionist David Irving, and the anti-Israel ex-congressman Paul Findley, who authored *They Dare to Speak Out*, a book that purported to expose the Israel lobby's conspiracy to control U.S. foreign policy. Davies brushes off such criticisms without conceding any ground. He explained to me that he does not explicitly equate events; he merely relates the various atrocities and invites readers to judge for themselves. On the topic of sources, he remarked, "It's a sad day when historians make references in footnotes that are then treated as sources of the historians' opinions."

Still, Davies has, at least until now, hardly gone out of his way to defuse charges of insensitivity. When questioned by a staff writer for *The Chicago Tribune* about the unfavorable review of *Europe* in *The New York Times Book Review*, he reportedly "dismissed the Princeton man [Rabb] with a vague mention of his ethnicity." And when asked by a *Daily Telegraph* reporter about the same review, Davies replied, "Rabb is putting out a few signals to his comrades-in-arms that there is a Jewish issue in the *Europe* book—although of course he won't say it."

THIS WAS not the first time that Davies discerned a conspiracy against him and his work. He expressed similar sentiments during his bruising tenure battle with Stanford in the spring of 1986. Then, too, the issue was whether his scholarship trod too close to advocacy. Davies, who was on the faculty at the University of London at the time, had come to Stanford in the fall of 1985 as a visiting professor but with the expectation that he would be offered a $70,000-a-year chair in East European history. After being approved by a faculty search committee and by a preliminary vote of the history department, he received an encouraging letter from Paul Robinson, the department chair. Robinson's letter sketched out the terms of the proposed appointment, noting, however, that it was still conditional on the approval of the board of trustees. Still, Davies says that on the strength of that letter he put a down payment (later forfeited) on a house on the Stanford campus. A week after Robinson's letter went out, a final meeting of the department was convened; Davies's appointment was voted down, twelve to eleven.

The criticisms aired over the course of that meeting focused almost exclusively on *God's Playground*. They were detailed in a highly unusual six-and-a-half-page, single-spaced letter to Davies from Stanford's then-provost, James Rosse. And for anyone who has followed *Europe*'s reception in America, they have an unmistakably familiar ring. A number of Stanford faculty, Rosse wrote, contended that *God's Playground* was long on rhetorical flourish and irony but short on analysis and explanation. More serious, though, was the complaint that Davies was not sufficiently critical of Poland. Here the charges centered around the chapter in *God's Playground* dealing with Polish-Jewish relations, which critics considered unacceptably exculpatory of the behavior of the Polish people. "It has always lain in the interests of the Zionist movement, which sought to persuade the Jews to leave their homes in Poland, to paint Polish life in the most unfavorable colors," Davies argues. And to the extent that Polish anti-Semitism was a reality, he writes, blame should be shared by Jews; after all, they welcomed the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939. (What Davies does not mention is that, at the time, much of Poland had already been overrun by the Nazis; many Polish Jews were forced to choose what they hoped would be the lesser of two evils.)

Perhaps most controversial in *God's Playground*, though, was a much-talked-about line that succinctly captures the author's take on Polish-Jewish relations during the war: "To ask why the Poles did little to help the Jews," he wrote, "is rather like asking why the Jews did nothing to assist the Poles." The unabashedly pro-Polish perspective

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IN AN INFLAMMATORY STATEMENT, DAVIES ARGUES THAT BLAME FOR POLISH ANTI-SEMITISM SHOULD BE SHARED BY JEWS.

reflected in this formulation raises some immediate questions. While it is no doubt true that the Poles were for the most part helpless to save Jews, they weren't entirely so. They might, for instance, have permitted Jewish partisans to join their fighting units, or they could have lent some support to the anti-Nazi uprising in the Warsaw ghetto. They did neither.

That said, it is worth noting that the charge brought against Davies at Stanford was not anti-Semitism per se; rather, his treatment of Polish-Jewish relations was considered emblematic of his clouded, overly partisan vision. *God's Playground* is "the Poles' history of Poland, the kind of work Polish historians in Poland—if allowed—would have loved to have written themselves," wrote one outside expert who was asked to assess Davies's work. "But as a result, the book is both more and less than professional scholarship." Davies's proponents don't deny that *God's Playground* is the work of someone sympathetic to Poland, but they insist that does not make it bad history. Quite the contrary, in fact. "People fall in love with their subjects and Norman certainly did that," says Anne Applebaum, "but I think that makes history better, not worse." Nevertheless, Applebaum—who reviewed *Europe* favorably and subsequently rushed to Davies's defense in an essay in *The New Criterion* that was reprinted in *Prospect* magazine under the headline NORMAN DAVIES IS INNOCENT—allows that Davies does like to play the enfant terrible. "Norman Davies is walking on eggs and wearing heavy boots," she says.

As the narrow margin of his defeat indicates, Davies was not without champions at Stanford. And some of his colleagues argued that because Polish historiography is so wanting, *God's Playground* should be given some extra latitude. His allies in the *Europe* debate trotted out a parallel defense. "It's a fault in the right direction," says the historian Paul Johnson of Davies's overemphasis on Poland. "Everything written about the history of Europe in this country has tended to stop short of the East German border, but if you go to Warsaw, they will show you a stone that is the geographical center of Europe—and, of course, it is." For his part, Davies eventually sued Stanford. Charging defamation and "tortious interference with an advantageous business relationship," the suit listed one Stanford history professor and thirty unnamed individuals as defendants and sought more than $3 million in damages.

After a judge rejected those claims, Davies amended the suit and tried again the following year. This time his charges included breach of contract, misrepresentation, discrimination on the basis of politics and creed, and negligent infliction of emotional distress. The suit now sought up to $9 million in damages. Davies alleged that he had been denied the chair—and the accompanying tenure—not on the basis of his academic bona fides but because of opposition to his political views. But the amended suit, too, was rejected by a judge, whose ruling was upheld by a court of appeals. If his intent was to clear his name as an apologist for Polish anti-Semitism, Davies chose the wrong attorney. He was represented by Paul McCloskey, a former Republican representative, who is notorious for his animus toward Israel. McCloskey himself was at the time embroiled in a dispute with Stanford's political science department over its unwillingness to count a course he taught there toward the poli sci major. The department had determined that McCloskey's course was too committed to the anti-Zionist position.

Today, Davies says he launched the suit reluctantly and only because he wanted to force the matter into the open. "I was just in a hopeless situation," he recalls. "McCloskey turned up one day and said he'd heard what was going on and could he help." Yet Davies's bitterness toward Stanford persists. Witness the introduction to *Europe*, in which he takes the university's history department to task for the narrow focus of its European civilization courses. "No zoo can contain all the animals," he writes. "But, equally, no self-respecting collection can confine itself to monkeys, vultures, or snakes."

Still, if Davies has failed to achieve the validation he sought from Stanford and the academic world, his self-confidence certainly remains intact. In a passage in *Europe* celebrating five hundred years of Oxford University Press, he includes himself—alongside such luminaries as Maimonides and Lewis Carroll—as one of the publisher's most noteworthy authors. And his stock as a writer, already higher than ever since the publication of *Europe,* may rise further this winter, as HarperCollins brings out in the United States a (much corrected) paperback edition of *Europe.* Ironically, its release has been slightly delayed by a publisher's error: The paperback's original cover line, evoking the sweeping historical narratives of previous centuries, advertised the book as "a history of Europe from the Urals to the Faroes"—a mountain chain and group of islands that actually lie just across the Arctic Circle from each other. The new cover line, no less boastful, will read: "a panorama of Europe, east and west, from the Ice Age to the Cold War, from the Urals to Gibraltar."

With *Europe,* Davies has planted himself squarely in the grand tradition of Gibbon, Michelet, and Macaulay. And certainly, in an era of specialization and professional jargon, his effort to revitalize the genre is welcome. But despite his range and skill as a chronicler, his place in this noble pantheon is far from secured. His current projects, including a book Davies describes excitedly as a "non-Anglocentric history of the British Isles," suggest that his fascination with the underdog and his desire to provoke continue unabated. Perversely, Davies's pugnacious temperament and eccentric views may be his most assured ticket to fame—and, just possibly, his undoing.

Jonathan Mahler is the editorial page editor of the *Forward* newspaper in New York. His article, "Uprooting the Past: Israel's New Historians Take a Hard Look at Their Nation's Origins," appeared in the August 1997 issue of *LF*.

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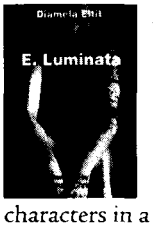

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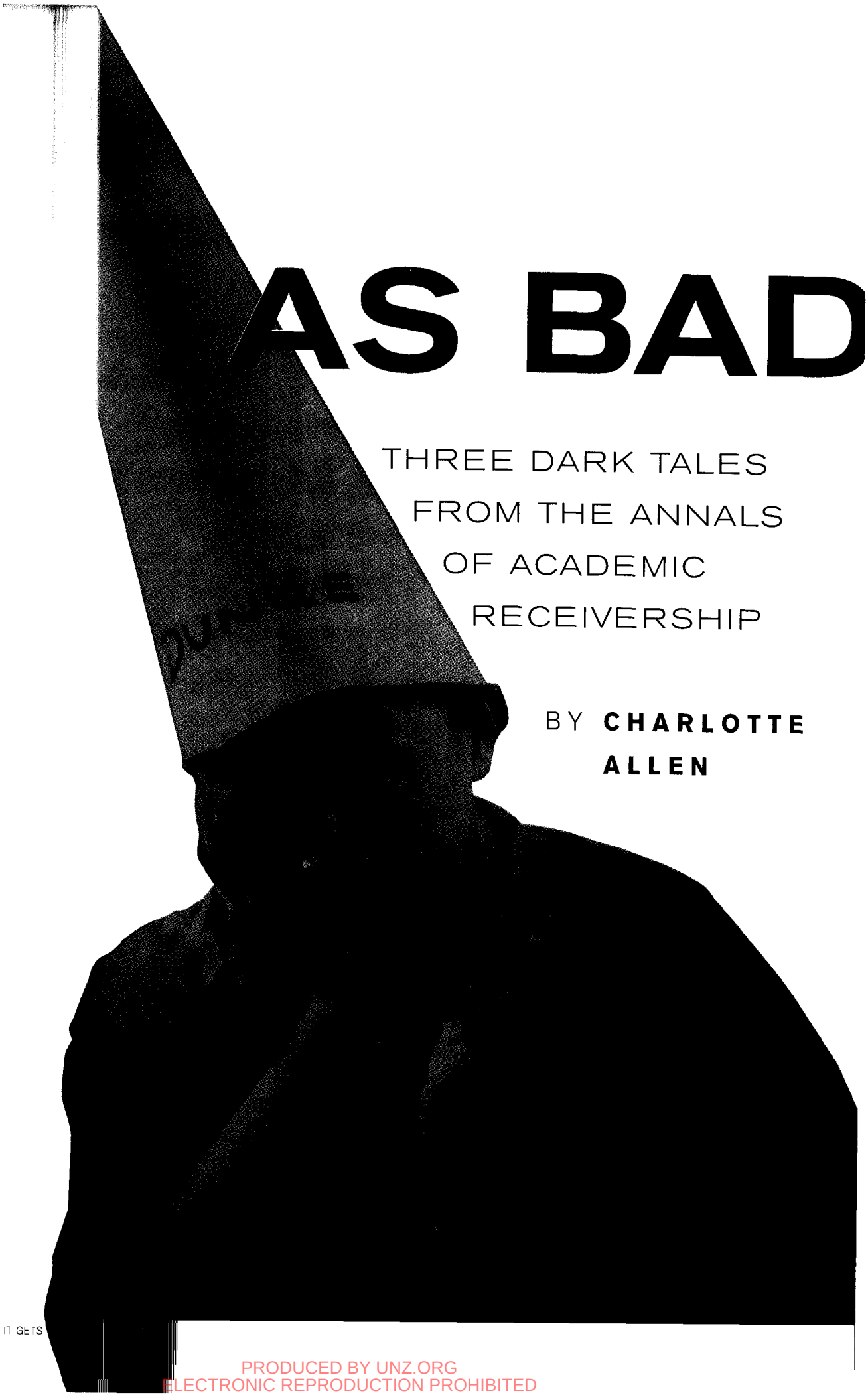
AS BAD

THREE DARK TALES FROM THE ANNALS OF ACADEMIC RECEIVERSHIP

BY **CHARLOTTE ALLEN**



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AS IT GETS

RECEIVERSHIP MAY BE ACADEME'S DIRTiest word. For those colleges and universities that have had to employ the term, receivership is a shameful secret, a dark blot on academic reputation and institutional self-image. Unfortunately, it is also a surprisingly recurrent phenomenon. Like floundering businesses that file for bankruptcy and thereby surrender their autonomy to a court-appointed trustee, academic departments in receivership relinquish control of their affairs to an external authority—a receiver. But unlike a bankrupt company that embraces Chapter 11 status to protect itself from creditors, an academic receivership is nearly always involuntary—an arrangement imposed at the behest of an administrator when ideological and personal infighting within a department becomes so intense that hiring, tenuring, and curriculum decisions grind to a standstill.

By the time the administration steps in, the dysfunctional department is apt to be in a state of near collapse, suffering from reduced productivity (as energy is drained away from research), student attrition, and, in the worst cases, a precipitous decline in quality and reputation. Sometimes, resuscitation consists of bringing in an outside chair: an astronomer imported from the physics department, say, to whip the Spanish department into shape. Alternatively, the administration may appoint an external committee, a group of professors drawn from outside the department—sometimes from outside the university—to make all hiring and tenure decisions.

Whatever the scenario, receivership bruises more than just the departmental ego. Faculty in an affected department may suffer daily humiliations as they find themselves beholden to colleagues from other disciplines for everything from paper clips to promotions. And although universities don't like to talk about receiverships, much less publicize them, they are hard to keep hush-hush. Sooner or later, word gets out to the entire academic world—or at least most of campus—that those on high have adjudged the faculty in question incapable of managing their own affairs. "It's distressing," says Mary Burgan, executive director of the American Association of University Professors, "an admission of total failure."

The stigma notwithstanding, receivership may be, perversely, a flaw built right into the present-day academic system—a by-product of the very freedoms that distinguish individuals in academic settings from their peers in the corporate world. As members of a department, professors are expected to reach agreement on whom to hire, whom to tenure, how to judge graduate students, what to teach. But the urge to forge a peaceful consensus is often overwhelmed by other concerns. After all, most academics at research universities presume the right to pursue their own intellectual curiosity and judgment wherever it may lead—they are under little professional obligation to subordinate their interests and beliefs to the requirements of their institution or to the need for comity. And unlike business success, which usually depends on teamwork, prestige in academic scholarship—research grants, endowed chairs, acclaimed books, teaching awards—is a largely individual accomplishment. Is it any surprise, then, that many faculty look upon a "promotion" to committee head or even department chair as something to dread rather than seek out?

For the most part, departments muddle along or even prosper under these somewhat asocial conditions. As long as the basic obligations to keep offering courses and to keep hiring faculty are met, it's of little concern to a dean if a department's members are at one another's throats (or barely know one another's names). But whenever a department exhibits a pronounced failure to agree on a curriculum or on which new professors to hire, a crisis arises. When the department is not meeting its responsibilities to the university, the rationale for faculty self-governance is suddenly put in question. Often, personal and ideological conflicts bring a department to this precipice. Exacerbating the likelihood of such a crisis is often—but not always—a budget crunch. When funding disappears, as it has at many universities in recent years, nasty departmental feuds can take on the aspect of a zero-sum struggle: What's to lose by fighting to the death?

Receivership is so mortifying for all concerned that few faculty members or administrators are willing to discuss their experiences with a reporter. Even fewer are willing to speak on the record. Nonetheless, *Lingua Franca* has pieced together the following tales of receivership in three top-tier university departments: anthropology at Columbia, literature at UC-Santa Cruz, and philosophy at Yale. In all three cases, the receiverships eventually ended, the diseased departments presumably restored

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to health. Still, our investigation suggests that many of the underlying problems that precipitated administrative takeovers in the first place have not been resolved. They may never be.

I. THE DREAM TEAM

Once the field's preeminent leader, the anthropology department at Columbia University has undergone not one but two embarrassing receiverships in the last fifteen years. The roots of the troubles reach back even earlier, to the institution-wide financial crisis that followed the 1968 student occupation of Columbia's administrative offices. Throughout the 1970s the university operated on a deficit, the physical plant deteriorated, and celebrated faculty members—including sociologist Daniel Bell—fled to more hospitable jobs elsewhere. Many slots remained empty.

In anthropology, a decade-long hiring freeze prevented promising young scholars from joining the ranks of a renowned but deeply traditional departmental faculty. This old guard, composed of anthropologists loyal to the teachings of the discipline's founding father, Columbia's own Franz Boas, doggedly pursued the traditional "four-field" approach to anthropological study, even as the discipline was changing drastically everywhere else. The Boasian ideal—an anthropologist comprehensively trained in four fields (physical anthropology, archaeology, linguistics, and cultural anthropology)—was being supplanted by the modern specialist who received a basic training in all four fields but quickly focused on a particular field or subfield (medical or symbolic anthropology, say) to the near exclusion of all other areas. By the end of the 1970s, the Columbia department was looking tired and provincial, while the newer, more specialized programs at Chicago, Michigan, and UC-Berkeley gained cutting-edge reputations.

To make matters worse, the Columbia department was riven by personality conflicts. Its senior members had coalesced into two camps, one headed by the brilliant and charismatic Robert Murphy, a cultural anthropologist who studied the Mundurucu people in the Brazilian Amazon basin, and the other composed of those who bitterly resented Murphy's pervasive influence. Perturbed by what appeared to be paralyzing departmental politicking, the administration appointed Alexander Alland Jr., a well-liked traditionalist, as acting chairman in 1981 and—in order to stop the quarreling—organized an "expanded executive committee" to take charge of hiring and tenuring. In addition to the regular group of senior anthropologists, the committee included two Columbia faculty members from other departments. "Everything from staples to faculty appointments was under monitoring," says an observer close to the scene.

Alland became the official chair the following year, and with the executive committee's help he increased the department's sagging numbers by recruiting six junior professors from Berkeley, Yale, and elsewhere. This was generally perceived as a move in the right direction—except that the younger contingent discovered that many of the older faculty members, more loyal to the four-field model, would scarcely speak to them. And the committee never did manage to make a single addition to the badly depleted senior ranks: Columbia's (not to mention New York City's) lackluster reputation at the time served as a disincentive to well-known scholars with comfortable posts at other universities.

Exasperated by the slow rate of progress, Jonathan Cole, Columbia's vice president for arts and sciences, pared down the executive committee and placed the department in receivership: In 1988, he appointed Richard Bulliet, a Columbia history professor, anthropology chairman. Bulliet had the powers of a dictator, and for sixteen months, he exercised them without inhibition. "The department had had a history of frequent and acrimonious meetings," Bulliet, now director of Columbia's Middle East Institute, recalls. "It was a culture of argument. So I just stopped it."

Indeed, Bulliet held virtually no meetings with faculty. (Given the contentiousness within the department, he says, group meetings were pointless.) He was supposed to have outside advisers—anthropologists from other institutions—but they never materialized. With no one to oppose him, he successfully pushed through the tenuring of two of Alland's young recruits, restructured the curriculum, and loosened some of the old four-field requirements for graduate students. "Not once did I have any direct complaints from faculty members," he says. "By and large they were relieved that I was there." Bulliet stepped down in the winter of 1989, satisfied that "the climate of rancor had been alleviated." The department's first receivership was over.

But shortly after Bulliet returned to the history department, the generational struggle on the anthropology faculty resumed. Group meetings became more divisive than ever: Two more young scholars joined Alland's newly tenured faculty, creating a forceful alliance known to senior members of the department as "the gang of four." By now, the discipline was dominated by specialists and subspecialists—from materialists who studied Marx or ecology to symbolists who approached cultures largely as discursive systems. The old four-field approach seemed less and less relevant.

In 1993 one of the younger generation, M. Elaine Combs-Schilling, became chair, but her efforts at restoring morale and reputation proved controversial. At her urging, the department hired Michael Taussig, a maverick anthropologist then teaching in the performance studies department at NYU. The colorful Taussig, who is known for lecturing barefoot and for attempting to blur the lines between ethnography and surrealism, quickly acquired a reputation for offering vituperative opinions of his Columbia colleagues and for opposing tenure bids.

CORBIS-BETTMANN

BUYING A BRAND-NEW DEPARTMENT IS ONE WAY TO CURE THE ILLS OF THE OLD.

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(Taussig declined to be interviewed for this article but denied such behavior.) In 1995 the National Research Council rated Columbia's anthropology doctorate program sixteenth in the nation—a humiliating ranking for the onetime cradle of the discipline. Moreover, thanks to the reluctance of distinguished outsiders to join Columbia's anthropology faculty, the number of tenured professors had shrunk to eleven (from a peak of eighteen in the late 1970s). In 1995, two years into her three-year term, Combs-Schilling abruptly stepped down.

DAVID COHEN

At that point, extraordinary measures once again seemed necessary. David Cohen, who had inherited Cole's job as Columbia's vice president for arts and sciences, decided that the only way to save the anthropology department was to take it over personally. Again, Alland was to be the front man. At the urging of his colleagues, Cohen recalled Alland from a sabbatical in France to serve as chairman for a year. "The vice president said that if we couldn't get our act together he would shut us down," Alland recalls.

It was Cohen, however, who actually did the hiring. As provost of Northwestern, Cohen helped build several departments into nationally ranked programs. Now, he paid top dollar to bring in five tenured professors, all of whom were involved in cutting-edge, wide-ranging anthropological research. "I got deeply involved in the search," says Cohen of his talent hunt, which netted him, among others, Nicholas Dirks, who cofounded the interdepartmental program in anthropology and history at Michigan, and Sherry B. Ortner, a Himalaya specialist and MacArthur "genius" grant recipient who was teaching at Berkeley. To house his enhanced faculty (the five new full professors plus another five of junior ranking), Cohen had the anthropology department's offices completely refurbished. The receivership was over. It was a remarkable—and to all appearances, successful—brain transplant.

Buying a brand-new department is one way to cure the ills of the old. However, Cohen's dollars may be unable to resolve the long-term problem: continued uncertainty and division over the future of anthropology as it becomes ever more specialized. "The discipline has always been unraveling, if by that you mean there is no internal consensus," says one former Columbia anthropologist. "But if the healthy diversity of opinions is not bound by a healthy respect for the bureaucratic process, you can—and will—get into real trouble."

II. THE FACILITATOR

The literature department at UC-Santa Cruz has always been something of a mongrel among purebred rivals at other top-drawer research universities. Unlike other schools, Santa Cruz has no separate departments of English, Italian, or classics. Instead, the several-dozen full-time professors who teach these and related subjects belong to a single academic unit, Literature, which was called a "board" until last summer and now bears the more conventional title "department." This sprawling department's eclecticism—its course offerings range from Greek mythology to contemporary Latin American novels and creative writing—has always been a source of friction among its faculty. With more than six hundred majors signed up at any given time, Literature also happened to be Santa Cruz's most popular undergraduate humanities program; the department frequently found itself understaffed. Yet, when it came to hirings, there was no agreement whatsoever. Should the department add a Japanologist? A specialist in Caribbean fiction?

By the late 1970s, the recurring curricular and ideological tensions had reached a boiling point. In 1977 Helene Moglen, a specialist in eighteenth-century English literature at SUNY Purchase, came to Santa Cruz as a literature professor and dean of humanities. Today, Moglen, who is chairman of the faculty senate, enjoys a campuswide reputation as a deft consensus builder and politician. Such was not the case twenty years ago, when, according to several colleagues, her assertive personality and tireless campaigning for a women's studies program (which she obtained) alienated many in the department.

Leading the opposition was John M. Ellis, a professor of German literature who served as dean of Santa Cruz's graduate division during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Ellis was not a big fan of new trends in literary scholarship. In 1989 he published a critical study titled *Against Deconstruction* (Princeton), and in 1992 he became literary editor of *Heterodoxy*, an anti-PC journal. The following year, he helped found the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics, an organization designed as an alternative to the Modern Language Association and its many feminist extremists, canon busters, and Marxist-oriented New Historicists. "Studying Marx is for the political science department," insists Ellis, who retired from Santa Cruz in 1994. "If you want to study Marx, become a political organizer. Our job is to teach literature."

Determined that Santa Cruz would not succumb to the virus of political correctness, Ellis fought a rear-guard battle against feminism and deconstruction. Moglen grew more conciliatory in the late 1980s, but by then, another assertive, progressive-minded professor had joined the department. Kristin Ross, whose scholarship on French popular culture was rated impeccable, quickly became an outspoken presence at faculty meetings. She and several colleagues set up a pilot program for a new major called "World Literature" that focused on writers traditionally overlooked by the Western mainstream: Latinos, Pacific Islanders, Africans, Asians, and so forth. "Rather than a ghettoized 'ethnic studies' program of the 1960s variety," Ross wrote in an essay explaining the program's goals, "we wanted to recognize ethnic studies as pivotal, central, and connected—in no way peripheral or marginal—to world literary and cultural production and debates."

Ellis was on leave during much of World Lit's planning stages, but that didn't stop him from denouncing the major as a Marxist indoctrination program whose real subject was not literature but colonialism and other perceived European injustices toward nonwhites. A

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number of Literature faculty members agreed with Ellis that the program had distinct ideological overtones. Furthermore, these critics complained, the World Lit contingent refused to let courses offered by faculty outside their own small group qualify for the program. Ultimately, the World Lit group hoped to found a breakaway department at Santa Cruz, but students showed little interest in the idea. Although lower-level World Lit classes were well subscribed, the program never attracted more than about fifteen majors.

Tensions in Literature boiled over in 1993, when the department deadlocked over the election of a new chair. At first, no one volunteered for the post. Eventually, however, two candidates came forward. One was John Lynch, a popular classicist who had held several administrative posts; the other was Richard Terdiman, a professor of French literature. "Each of us had to go before the faculty in two separate sessions," says Lynch, whose plan to standardize course requirements for the Literature major enraged the World Lit faction. "My part of the session was fairly ugly, but I heard that Terdiman's session was uglier still." The reason: A female professor in the department had accused Terdiman of sexual harassment, and although the charges were found to be without merit following an official investigation, the accusations resurfaced as the most burning issue at Terdiman's inter-view. Ultimately, both candidates withdrew their names in disgust.

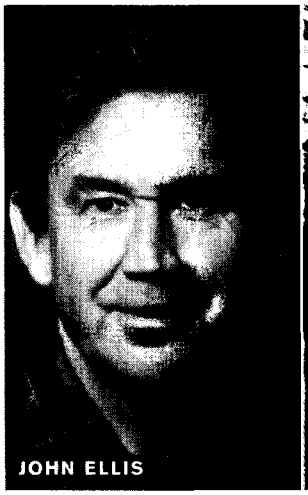
By the time Santa Cruz's dean of humanities, Gary Lease, stepped in, the situation seemed insoluble. In desperation, he sought help from outside the academic community altogether: He hired Marilyn Manning, a management consultant who had extensive experience in team building and conflict mediation to try out her techniques on the warring academics. Her three visits to Santa Cruz were by all accounts a failure (some faculty simply refused to talk to her). "I'd say they were one of the most challenging groups I'd ever had," is her delicate way of putting it. "They were sharing very few of the same priorities. Standing in front of their classrooms hadn't given them any meeting-management training or personnel-management skills. I believe that I was called in too late. If I'd been there a year or two earlier, I could have turned it around." After Manning's pricey but unsuccessful intervention, receivership must have seemed the only possible remedy.

MARILYN MANNING

Lease, who had a reputation for playing hardball with intractable departments, subsequently devised a cheap and effective method for imposing order on the Literature faculty: financial deprivation. Implementing the plan was not difficult. The state of California was in the middle of a deep recession, and Lease was helping to administer 5-percent-per-year budget cuts throughout the UC system. With attrition and early-retirement incentives (Ellis was one of the takers), the Santa Cruz Literature department lost about ten positions, a third of its usual complement. Lease appointed Jorge Hankamer, a member of the linguistics department, as chair but refused to allow any of the department's vacancies to be filled, arguing that the department should first develop an orderly plan of growth.

Though few in the department harbored warm feelings for Lease, the receivership succeeded in restoring a measure of calm to the beleaguered department. Hankamer installed as his deputy Loisa Nygaard, a hardworking Germanist who enjoyed the respect of all factions, and when Hankamer replaced Lease as humanities dean in 1995, Nygaard succeeded him as chair, and the program was once again run by an insider. The World Lit major quietly disappeared, together with its attendant controversy. Most striking of all, when he took over the deanship, Hankamer gave faculty morale another boost by reversing Lease's moratorium on departmental growth. Funds for new positions began to flow again.

Lease, however, thinks it's premature to celebrate. The troubles at Santa Cruz, he suspects, are likely to resurface as soon as the glow of the extra greenbacks wears off. "The problems were not just personal," he says. "The department still has an amoeba-like structure. My plan was to reduce it to a level where you could get a design in place, not just throw them a bone to quiet them. Now, I won't be surprised to see the same problems pop up again in a few years."


JOHN ELLIS

SANTA CRUZ

III. FROM BAD TO WORSE

Unfortunately, not only can receivership fail to cure departmental dysfunction, it can make the problems worse. The troubles at Yale's philosophy department date

DON HARRIS

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CONFLICT RESOLUTION SPECIALIST MARILYN MANNING WAS UNABLE TO SOLVE SANTA CRUZ'S PROBLEMS.

back to the war over methodology that plagued many American philosophy departments during the 1950s and 1960s. Those decades were the glory days of analytic philosophy, derived from the thinking of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Bertrand Russell, and others. Analytic philosophy eschews airy speculation and, broadly speaking, focuses on the logical analysis of language and concepts. While rival methodologies—phenomenology, existentialism, structuralism—flourished on the European Continent, analytic philosophy became the dominant school of the Anglophone world. The American analytics believed that they alone really "did" philosophy. Everyone else—Platonists, Kantians, devotees of American pragmatism—was perhaps an intellectual historian or a political theorist but certainly not a philosopher. To this day, several of the nation's top-rated philosophy departments, including Harvard and Princeton, are almost exclusively analytic in orientation.

The Yale philosophy department, by contrast, tried for many years to represent a spectrum of schools. In 1973 the department hired Ruth Barcan Marcus, a leading analytic philosopher and specialist in modal logic. Marcus (who declined to be interviewed for this article) had a cast-iron personality, and she was determined to remold Yale into a bastion of analytic thinking. Her main technique was to fight to the death tenurings of nonanalytic junior faculty as well as appointments of nonanalytic outsiders. She quickly helped send packing two promising junior phenomenologists, David Carr (now chair of philosophy at Emory) and Edward Casey (now chair of philosophy at SUNY Stony Brook).

But absolute victory eluded Marcus. Her leading opponent on the Yale faculty was John Smith, an exponent of the American pragmatist school and a philosopher of religion. As department chair, Smith had recruited Marcus to Yale but remained a staunch advocate of the program's pluralistic tradition. In 1980 Smith was elected president of the Eastern division of the American Philosophical Association (APA) over the opposition of Marcus, who chaired the APA's national board of officers. Smith and Marcus were famous for their floor fights at the APA—mostly debates over pluralism within philosophy—which they took back with them to Yale.

The result was an impasse that prevented virtually any new hirings or tenurings for most of the 1970s and 1980s. Never large to begin with, the Yale philosophy department began to implode, as deaths, retirements, and departures of talented members who could no longer stand the atmosphere took their toll. As the department grew smaller, the internecine battles only intensified. With entire fields of philosophy now missing from the senior-faculty roster, visitors (including Casey, invited back from Stony Brook) and junior members increasingly performed "service" work, such as teaching needed undergraduate courses. Finally, in 1985, the department managed to agree on a new senior hire, Jonathan Lear, who, to Marcus's satisfaction, had been analytically trained but whose scholarship included Aristotelian and, later, psychoanalytic studies. The following year, the high-profile Columbia law school dean Benno C. Schmidt Jr. took over the Yale presidency. Schmidt (who declined to be interviewed) reportedly made Lear what seemed an irresistible offer: If he would agree to serve as philosophy department chair, Schmidt would give him some new faculty positions and back him up in departmental feuds.

By all accounts, however, Schmidt failed to provide the promised budgetary and moral support. After struggling through two years as chair, Lear threw in the towel. Partly at Lear's urging, Schmidt then set up a two-committee receivership for the philosophy department: an outside team of distinguished philosophers from elsewhere who would determine scholarly gaps and recruit new faculty to fill them, and an internal team of nonphilosophers on the Yale faculty who would operate the department on a day-to-day basis. "It was a very unpleasant kind of time," says Smith. "It was unpleasant to be summoned after forty years to an outside executive committee. It's like losing your credit."

Despite the internal turmoil, the outside experts did their best to carry out their assigned task. They came up with five talented youngish candidates for new senior appointments, including Sam Scheffler, an ethicist from UC-Berkeley, and Alan Code, an Aristotle specialist from Ohio State. The committee dangled offers before the five candidates and submitted their names to Schmidt for approval. But university officials failed to follow through; Schmidt reportedly did not even return any of the candidates' phone calls. The formal offers eventually came through, but all five candidates, by now feeling insulted, turned them down. Miffed at Schmidt's high-handedness, the external committee disbanded itself, leaving departmental operations in the hands of the internal committee members, who joked that they had come to think of themselves as philosophers. Hirings and tenurings came to a standstill.

By 1992 both Smith and Marcus had retired, and the number of tenured philosophy professors in the department dropped to three. That year, the department declared a moratorium on the admission of new graduate students. (Amazingly, philosophy remained one of the ten biggest undergraduate majors throughout this period.) Finally in 1993, just after Schmidt resigned, an interim administration approved the first philosopher to chair the department in three years: Robert Adams, a specialist in philosophy of religion who was then teaching at UCLA. Adams's wife, Marilyn McCord Adams, also on the UCLA philosophy faculty, had been recruited by Yale's divinity school and religious studies department, and the two came to the university as a package.

Adams's nick-of-time arrival was supposed to signal a brave new beginning for

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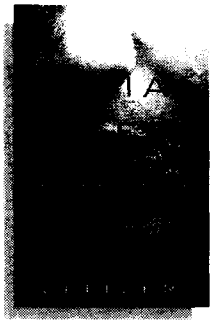

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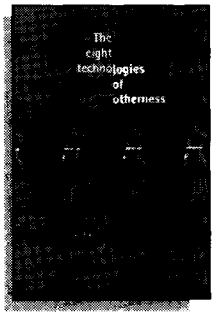

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ROUTLEDGE

NEIMAN'S SUIT CHARGES YALE WITH ENTRUSTING HER PROMOTION TO A GROUP OF SCHOLARS WHO DID NOT UNDERSTAND HER WORK.

philosophy at Yale. And in some ways it did. Under Adams, four new senior faculty members were hired. In 1994 Adams reopened the department to graduate students, and today there are approximately twenty doctoral candidates.

Other aspects of his oversight have been problematic, however. For one thing, the internal advisory committee of nonphilosophers continued to vote on faculty appointments and tenurings for three years after Adams took the chair, leading critics to charge that he was using the panel's votes to push through his own candidates. Indeed, a lawsuit alleging exactly that is pending against Yale over one of the committee's last official acts before it disbanded in 1996: a vote against tenure for Susan Neiman, a well-regarded Kantian who had been teaching in the department since 1988. Neiman's book *The Unity of Reason: Rereading Kant* (Oxford, 1994) was widely hailed as a major contribution to the field, while her more personal work *Slow Fire* (Schocken, 1992), about German-Jewish relations, won an award from PEN in 1993. Neiman was also only the second philosophy instructor to have won Yale's Sarai Ribicoff Award for excellence in teaching in the humanities. When she was nominated to fill a vacant tenure slot in Kant studies, the department's senior faculty split down the middle two to two, with Adams casting one of the negative ballots. When the nonphilosophers from the internal committee cast their votes with Adams, Neiman lost the battle. The Kant position went instead to Allen Wood, also a respected Kant scholar, and, unlike Neiman, a friend of Adams's.

SUSAN NEIMAN

Jonathan Lear, who was one of Neiman's chief supporters, resigned from Yale to protest and took a position at the University of Chicago. "I tried to convince the chair and the provost that Yale should appoint an ad hoc committee of Kant experts to evaluate Neiman's qualifications," Lear recalls. "When that did not happen, I could not remain at a university where my erstwhile colleagues were indifferent to the most elementary conditions of fairness in the evaluation of a junior colleague."

Neiman also left Yale, to accept a lower-paying job at from Tel Aviv University. Her suit charges Yale with breach of contract for entrusting her promotion to a group of scholars who were not trained in her field and did not understand her work. Moreover, according to Neiman's legal complaint, when Yale administrators expressed their willingness to fund a second senior Kantian, Adams refused to consider her for the post. Adams declines to comment on Neiman's suit except to defend the internal committee: "The people who were involved here from outside the discipline got advice from relevant, qualified people in the field."

Neiman's lawsuit represents a worst-case scenario of receivership: In challenging the authority of the nonphilosophers to judge her work, her suit strikes at one of receivership's central practices. But even without her suit, the Yale philosophy department's seven years of receivership cannot be said to have done it much good. "The department is still struggling," observes Casey, who still pinch-hits for Yale from time to time (and currently heads a search committee for an interim chair at the deeply troubled Stony Brook English department).

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"Given all the bad press it's gotten, many distinguished people have been hesitant to come to Yale," he explains. "They don't know what to expect. They don't know what kind of graduate students they'll have. Adams's job is to change all of that, but he's having a hard time."

IS THERE a way to avoid the shame and the pain, not to mention the frequently equivocal outcome, of an academic receivership? William F. Massy, a former education professor and administrator at Stanford who holds a degree in operations management, thinks there is. He is currently a senior researcher at the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement. Along with Andrea K. Wilger, he is busy compiling case studies of sick and healthy university departments. The wisest course, he says, is to treat departmental dysfunction—early warning signs include bickering faculty—long before the disputes become paralyzing. Massy suggests that deans and vice presidents look to the "quality movement" surging through industry and government for hints on how to foster greater departmental collegiality and effectiveness. "What we can try to accomplish is to set common goals and figure out what we should be working on in teams," he says. "The goals can be commonsense things, taking a cohort of undergraduates through a core curriculum, for example." One good technique, Massy suggests, is the old carrot-and-stick approach, using budget allotments as incentives for departmental peacekeeping: "Invest in the department that gets the job done," he says.

All of Massy's advice sounds obvious and sensible, but carrying it out won't be easy. Advocates of teamwork confront an academic culture devoted to the hard-won prerogatives of individual choice and self-governance. For all that, deans and faculty alike know that with new rounds of budget cuts ahead, the tensions within university departments are only likely to increase. Departments will continue to fall apart. And academic receivers will continue—with varying degrees of success—to try to pick up the pieces.

Charlotte Allen is a contributing editor of *Lingua Franca*. Her book, *The Human Christ: The Search for the Historical Jesus*, is forthcoming from The Free Press.

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ATTENTION DEFICITS

BY **S.D. METCALF**

DOES SPECIAL EDUCATION LEAVE MANY POOR LEARNERS BEHIND?

When Anne Schneider, mother of one of the learning-disabled students who successfully sued Boston University for discrimination this past fall, saw the cartoon in *The New Republic,* she couldn't believe her eyes. "They're like the Nazis, with their cartoons of the dirty Jew covered in lice," she seethed quietly into the phone. The drawing in question depicts a healthy white baby outfitted (by a group called the "Americans with Disabilities Act Research, Inc.") for a "small learning disability to qualify for special aid." While Schneider's analogy is leaky, she has an impressive alliance to back up her dudgeon. Science assumes learning disabilities—no less than hypertension, diabetes, and autism—have a biological foundation; the courts uphold their inclusion in the Americans with Disabilities Act; the media regularly hype neurological underpinnings for syndromes like dyslexia and attention-deficit disorder. "In ten years," predicts Schneider, heralding the day when mocking learning disabilities is no more acceptable than racism, "this will all have gone away."

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Learning disabilities—or "LDs"—were born in the early 1960s, when concerned parents began lobbying educators for a label to distinguish their underperforming children from those branded lazy or, worse, Educably Mentally Retarded. A learning disability, argued proponents, was a "minimal brain dysfunction" impairing isolated learning faculties while leaving higher-order cognitive functioning, such as abstract reasoning, unaffected. (The most familiar example of a learning disability is dyslexia, or difficulty in decoding written language, accounting for nearly 80 percent of cases.)

The learning-disability diagnosis helped to bring government assistance to many learners who badly needed help. But the label became so popular that it threatened to become omnipresent. As one of its original researchers lamented, parents began pestering him to classify children who "stuttered," "teased the family cat," or "had night terrors" as learning disabled.

Partisanship on the issue now divides starkly. Advocates proclaim the existence of a new civil right: Invoking the tenets of anti-discrimination law, they want to ensure that some aspects of mental performance will be considered just as irrelevant to a person's genuine capabilities as race and gender. Skeptics retort that dumb people shouldn't get what smart people deserve. Both sides make emotional appeals constructed largely out of anecdotal evidence, and after thirty years, neither has a decisive advantage. But what if the terms of the debate have been completely misconstrued? A new book promises to turn the discussion upside down; and, for a work critical of the overreach of anti-discrimination efforts, it comes with a surprising ideological pedigree: the left.

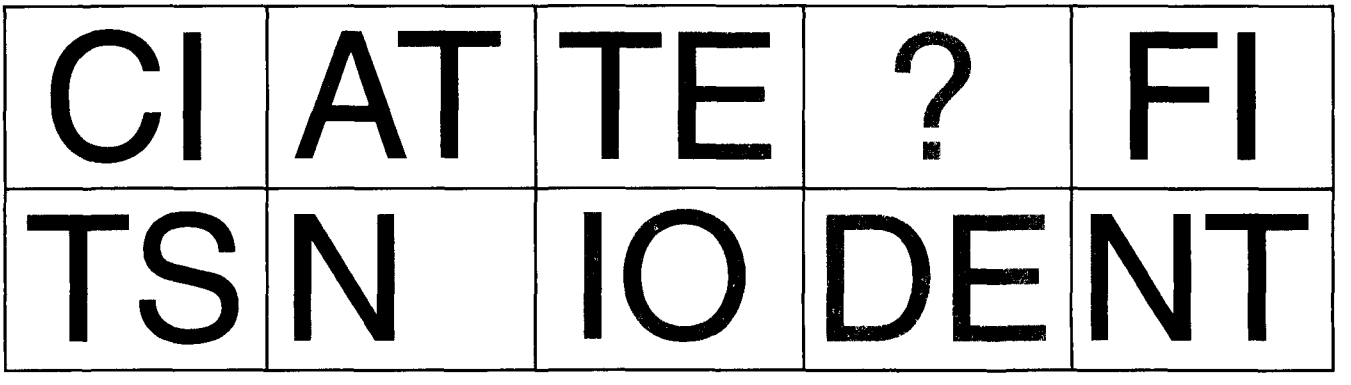
MARK KELMAN, a Stanford law professor and a pioneer of the radical Critical Legal Studies movement, first confronted the learning-disabilities movement as a university administrator reviewing requests for accommodations on law school exams. Seeking out Stanford's "disability coordinators" to question why certain students were granted an extra hour for tests while classmates scribbled furiously to beat the clock, he couldn't believe how "incredibly un-self-critical their position was."

Researching further, however, Kelman quickly discovered that the issue is hardly confined to a few law students copping extra time on exams. He was stunned by the sheer size of the learning-disability entitlement: By his calculation, the cost of devoting special resources to the learning disabled amounts to roughly $9 billion a year. This figure, he pointedly observes, is eight times the amount spent on the JOBS program reducing welfare dependency and four times the size of Head Start. What's more, federal guidelines require teachers to treat the learning disabled differently from other struggling students. Every diagnosed child is entitled to an entire curriculum customized to his abilities, complete with a "multi-disciplinary team" of educational specialists who tutor, monitor progress, and must be consulted every time the child falters in any way. Diagnosed children are also practically immune to serious discipline, resulting in some especially perverse consequences. (In many schools, if a learning-disabled student gets into a fight, he will go unpunished even as his fellow combatant gets suspended.)

Kelman is the first to acknowledge that educational opportunity is a precious resource. All the more reason to ask: Why do pupils labeled learning disabled *in particular* merit special attention? The result of Kelman's investigation, *Jumping the Queue: An Inquiry into the Legal Treatment of Students with Learning Disabilities*, will be published by Harvard University Press this month. Kelman and his co-author, Gillian Lester of UCLA Law School, availed themselves of all the science, law, and social history surrounding cognitive disabilities and conducted extensive field research. Their work raises a tough question: Are learning-disability policies the rectification of a long-neglected injustice—or, rather, a misguided entitlement program that diverts help from some of the children who need it most?

AS TO whether learning-disabled kids share a specific, underlying biological commonality (the way Down's syndrome children share an extra chromosome), rather than a loose set of behavioral traits (poor performance on certain kinds of tests), Kelman remains agnostic. But he concludes that even if identifiable learning disabilities do exist, there's no good reason for learning-disabled children to claim government resources withheld from their foundering peers. Kelman argues that scientific studies consistently show that the learning disabled do *not* benefit from special tutoring any more than other faltering students lacking an official diagnosis. "Proponents claim that learning-disabled students are uniquely capable of doing better," says Kelman. "But, empirically, this assertion is extremely weak."

Compounding this problem, argues Kelman, is the fact that the learning-disability diagnosis itself is maddeningly vague, often contradictory, and, more



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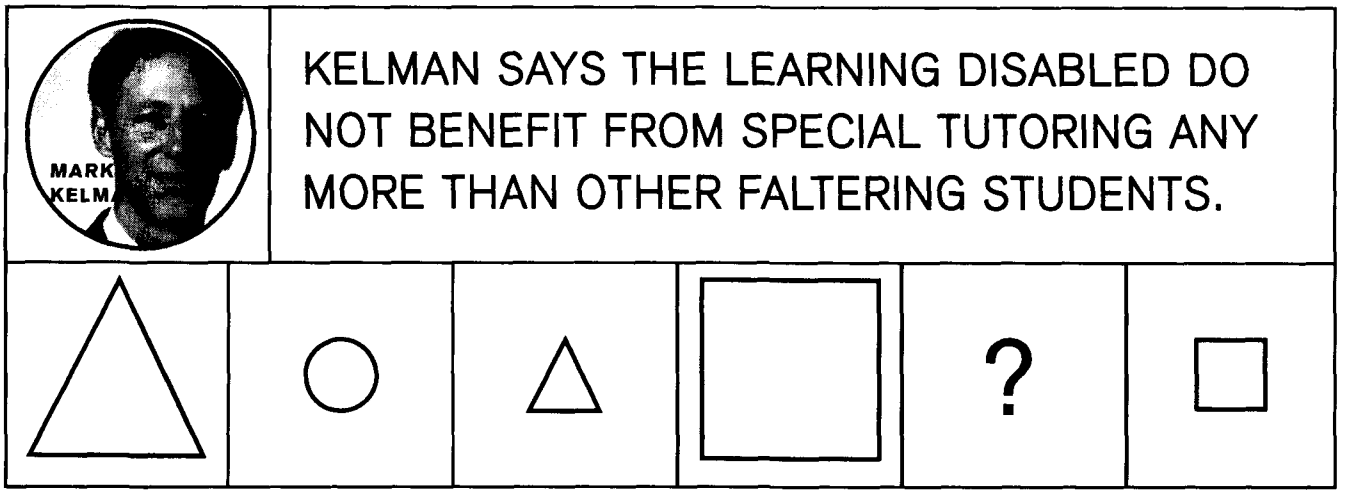
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KELM
KELMAN SAYS THE LEARNING DISABLED DO NOT BENEFIT FROM SPECIAL TUTORING ANY MORE THAN OTHER FALTERING STUDENTS.
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than anything, "expectationally driven." Science and the law officially define "learning disability" as an unexplained discrepancy between "potential" and "actual" performance, where "potential" is typically measured by one's achievement on an intelligence test. Thus a child with high IQ scores would merit the learning-disabled label if he also has poor math skills ("dyscalculia"). In reality, however, as Kelman observes, a child's race, class, and gender often directly influence the educator's diagnosis. In a 1981 study, for example, 224 public and private school professionals in Minnesota were given the hypothetical file of a physically attractive, upper-middle-class girl whose aptitude and grades were both mediocre—that is, they showed no meaningful discrepancy. Nonetheless, 90 percent of these administrators—all of whom were involved in real student-placement decisions—advocated placement in Special Ed.

Not surprisingly, the learning disabled remained overwhelmingly white and wealthy into the 1970s. "The designation closely tracked the demographic of its lobbying parents," writes Kelman. Special educators reply, however, that inequities have been rectified; in fact, many poor and minority children now receive learning-disability entitlements. Not satisfied by the recent statistics, however, Kelman and Lester were intent on determining exactly how formal law translates into local practice. To this end, they enlisted informants in four states across a variety of economic strata to describe in detail who earns the Special Ed label and—more important—what happens to them subsequently.

THE AUTHORS discovered that disability exists in two distinct Americas: In affluent suburbs, children are routinely classified learning disabled when they underperform academically, even if there is little discrepancy between their IQ scores and their grades. Here, the diagnosis is the occasion for some extra help, and is part of the greater support structure that well-heeled schools provide to safeguard a child's future. Such kids aren't booted out of mainstream classrooms; rather, after-school sessions or a weekly tutorial—in lieu of art class, say—provide the needed boost. (Even better, they can take extra time on the SAT when they apply to college.) In poor districts, however, the problem is the opposite: There, the learning-disabled diagnosis is often used as a disciplinary tool. Rather than gaining extra privileges, disruptive students are shunted out of the mainstream classroom and into dead-end day classes where minority students are wildly overrepresented.

Indeed, in New York City, the Office of Civil Rights has repeatedly charged that minorities are warehoused in Special Ed via the learning-disability diagnosis. At the same time, wealthier parents often leap at the label. In this spirit, a recent memo from the Coordinated Campaign for Learning Disabilities begins with the following cheery pitch: "Most parents have already received their child's first report card, and many may have recognized their child is having difficulties in school. If your child is falling behind, don't get angry, get help—your child may have a learning disability."

In the absence of a coherent set of criteria, the proportion of students labeled LD varies widely from state to state, even district to district. But, argue Kelman and Lester, even if each school's practice could be brought into line with federal statute, the diagnosis would still be largely built around an invidious measure—the IQ test. Kelman and Lester call this "IQ fetishism," and here, in many ways, is the heart of their argument. "What's so perverse is that disability-resource coordinators were fixated on IQ, when in any other context they would have vilified intelligence tests as racist or classist," says Kelman, recalling his initial experience at Stanford. And what kind of benchmark is this, he wondered, for construing a civil right? Any prima facie faith in IQ tests is, of course, rejected out of hand when left-wing critics answer *The Bell Curve;* why is it acceptable for promoting learning disabilities? There is "little doubt," Kelman and Lester conclude provocatively, that "advocating the idea that high-IQ children are especially meritorious is not only difficult to defend on its own terms, but has disturbing political overtones of class bias."

Then why is LD such a popular diagnosis, especially among middle-class parents? Perhaps, as some defenders intimate, the learning disabled suffer uniquely because of their inability to actualize their true talents—the tragedy of the bright student who, nonetheless, fails. Yet "there is a less benevolent explanation as well," Kelman and Lester argue: "Those who advocate spending on the learning disabled (unconsciously) have adopted the potential-development position to stand in for a publicly unarticulable fear that [socially privileged students] ought not to face status degradation."

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EVEN learning-disability proponents have recognized that singling out children solely on the basis of IQ is troubling. Indeed, the "IQ-discrepancy diagnosis" has come under attack from within the learning-disability community itself. University of Toronto researcher Keith Stanovich is firmly in the camp that believes in LD's existence, but finds the IQ benchmark tenuous, if not useless. Stanovich's experimental work in *The Journal of Educational Psychology* is Kelman's primary source for asserting that a dyslexic and a "garden-variety poor reader"—someone who reads poorly but at a level consonant with his IQ—do not differ fundamentally as readers. That is, they process verbal and orthographic information the same way, and, even more startlingly, they respond nearly identically to remedial intervention.

Stanovich is notorious for the Swiftian epistemological bender he went on in 1993, when he authored an article for the *Journal of Learning Disabilities* called "Dysrationalia: A New Specific Learning Disability." Considering that the IQ paradigm allows anything a "smart" subject does poorly to be considered a sign of a disability, Stanovich kidded, why not grant learning-disabled status to everyone who has an above-average IQ but is incapable of forming rational beliefs? (Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, he noted, was a "notorious dupe for mediums.") Some people apparently didn't get Stanovich's humor: Boston University president Jon Westling's crusade against learning disabilities was touched off, in part, by a letter from a student's doctor diagnosing "dysrationalia." From Kelman's book, it becomes clear that Stanford must have missed the point as well. "Reasoning deficit," reads one entry in the university's learning-disability policy, is defined as "trouble thinking in an orderly, logical way; difficulty prioritizing and sequencing tasks; difficulty applying learned skills to a new task."

If the principled defense of learning disabilities doesn't rest on the IQ-dependent diagnosis, what *is* its basis? Stanovich does believe learning disabilities have a biological foundation. He points in particular to an impressively coherent picture of dyslexia that has emerged from more than a decade of congressionally mandated research conducted under the aegis of the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). The folk concept of dyslexia, the arbitrary "switching of letters," was abandoned by researchers early on; they now define it as a specific language deficit in "phonological awareness," the largely auditory skill with which words are broken down into phonemic segments. (The word "bat," for example, is composed of three phonemes: *buh-ah-tuh,* that a normal learner blends together seamlessly while reading.)

For many researchers, this "phonological processing deficit" comes close to fulfilling the dream of learning-disability advocates: identifying a unique set of poor learners who are genuinely language-impaired from birth. Its strongest proponents believe that phonological processing measures the hard-wired limits of a child's reading potential. "We now have unequivocal evidence that reading disability is persistent, it doesn't go away," says Sally Shaywitz, a prominent dyslexia researcher at Yale.

And yet, many critics of the learning-disability movement find any search for a single etiology—the neurologically based "glitch" that *is* dyslexia—just as troubling as the fixation on IQ scores. The new diagnoses, these critics fear, may rely on an equally misplaced faith in the explanatory power of biology.

GERALD COLES is a proud veteran of the 1960s left. A retired education professor at the University of Rochester, Coles demonstrated against Vietnam in college—and recently took to the picket line to "beat back Wal Mart from Ithaca." In 1978 he wrote a landmark article for the *Harvard Educational Review* taking on educational test batteries like IQ. For the past twenty years, Coles has been the gadfly for the learning-disabilities movement, publishing its most comprehensive critique to date, *The Learning Mystique* (1987). In the book, he faults parents, teachers, and scientists for lunging at an excuse for a child's failure to learn, one that in turn absolves the child from trying to overcome his own weaknesses. Persevering through each new wave of high-tech diagnoses, scientific breakthroughs, and miracle cures, Coles casts a consistently skeptical eye on the research industry that lends the learning-disability diagnosis much of its cachet. "Teachers and educators don't have the time or inclination, as a rule, to go through this material," he sighs, referring to the piles of raw data the learning-disabilities lobby regularly publishes.

If teachers *did* scrutinize the data, Coles argues, they might well be surprised by the flimsiness of the science. In the early 1980s, gene researchers were convinced they had isolated "the reading gene" on chromosome 15, publishing their results to great fanfare. Coles taught himself enough of the science to dispute the finding—and not surprisingly, failed replication studies forced the geneticists to retract. (They have since moved on, with equal gusto, to chromosome 6. Coles calls such efforts "fishing expeditions.")

An equally hyped 1994 brain-dissection study by Harvard neuroscientist Albert Galaburda was Coles's bête noire for years, until other researchers began to identify its methodological flaws. Galaburda reported that neurons located in the medial geniculate, the purported phonological processing region of the brain, are asymmetrical for dyslexics: For the reading-disabled group, neurons on the left side were smaller than neurons on the right side. However, Coles notes this holds true only if one *averaged* the results for both groups; taken individually, the results were far less conclusive. As Coles puts it, Galaburda failed to explain how "individual readers with the same neural pattern as the reading disabled actually learned to read." (Galaburda acknowledges that "there are people who are not dyslexic who have abnormal brain asymmetry" but insists that "their assymetry is of a different type.")

Beyond any single case, though, Coles believes the myriad brain-anatomy research and epidemiological studies amount to a useless diversion. Coles observes that many academics find the quest to identify a biological basis for other behavioral traits, such as criminality, to be scientifically dubious and frightening in its political implications. And many scholars also question the use of an IQ score as the transcendent measure of mental worth. So why is what amounts to biological predestination acceptable for reading skills? Can environmental influences really be factored out of children's reading abilities?

Researchers at NICHD hope to do just that by asking students to sound out nonsense words. Such words are equally

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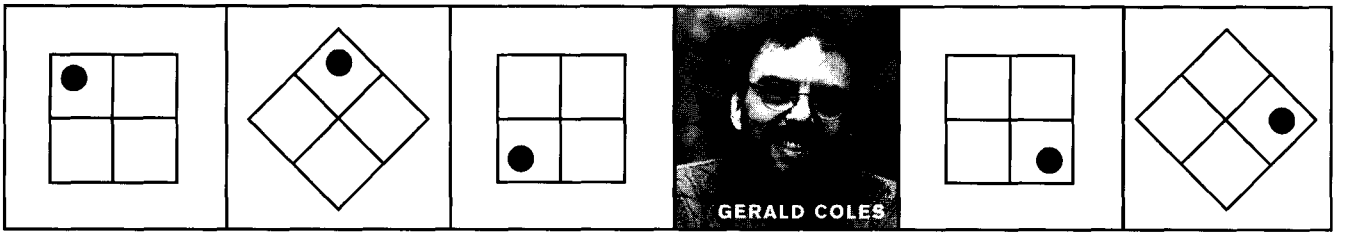

COLES HAS CAST A CONSISTENTLY SKEPTICAL EYE ON THE RESEARCH INDUSTRY PROMOTING LEARNING DISABILITIES.

unfamiliar to everybody, the logic goes, and so students from literacy-friendly homes should enjoy no distinct advantage. But Coles contends that a more experienced reader will surely get better over the years at attacking new words phonetically. "Thirteen years and thirty million dollars later," Coles says of the publicly funded NICHD research, "this is hardly a deep insight into causality." The result of these studies, Coles fears, is to disguise the importance of nonbiological influences. "Phonological awareness," he writes in his forthcoming book *Reading Lessons: The Debate Over Literacy* (Hill & Wang), "is a marker of social and literacy experiences...strongly determined by political-economic inequities in class, race, and gender." In other words, phonological processing is at least partially a symptom of social injustice, not simply biology.

Kelman, for his part, isn't much impressed with the notion of an inborn phonological processing deficit either. Imagine a society of javelin throwers, he proposes. In general, those citizens who are graceful and in top physical condition excel at the sport; those who aren't tend to be less successful. However, a few citizens have good musculature and coordination but, for some reason, just can't master javelin-throwing technique. What makes us think of them as "disabled" rather than "unable" is our largely unexamined expectation that they *should be* good throwers. In order to defend this assumption, Kelman argues, one must jump to dubious conclusions about the origins of javelin-tossing technique. The same way advocates of a specific reading disability claim phonological processing indicates something inborn, javelin-disability advocates would be forced to claim, say, a good release point was more innate than learned.

IN THE end, Kelman urges us to be indifferent to arcane debates about whether learning disabilities are innate. Even if the learning disabled could be identified with precision, we still need to make pragmatic choices about what resources they are entitled to and why. In Kelman's view, this task is only made harder by LD masquerading as a civil-rights issue when in fact it's a "case study in the overuse of the anti-discrimination norm." Funds, Kelman insists over and over, are eternally scarce, and we can't afford to be vague, sentimental, or cowed in doling them out. (By contrast, some learning-disability advocates come across as evasive. When disability-rights lawyer Guy Wallace was asked whether he would hire a bright job candidate who needed twice the time to complete the work of a regular lawyer, he replied: "I don't want to talk about our office because we have very limited resources, a massive caseload, and comparatively few lawyers to do the work. But let's assume we're talking about a sizable law firm...")

So what should be done? Kelman and Lester do not wish to do away with the learning-disability diagnosis altogether, but they do advocate breaking free of the straitjacket of anti-discrimination law and all its strict mandates and entitlements. Instead, they would allow schools greater leeway in allocating resources among faltering students, of whatever stripe. For one, the professors assert that schools should be allowed to discontinue Special Ed assistance for students who repeatedly fail to show improvement. They also encourage "leakage": That is, schools should allow Special Ed instructors to aid *all* students requiring extra help in the classroom—not just the learning disabled, as currently mandated by law.

While Kelman's turn to a kind of Realpolitik may signal a new breed of tempered left-wing policy analysis, he is careful to point out that *Jumping the Queue* is also a look back to a different era of liberal politics. "This is our attempt to keep a pre-identity politics leftism alive," Kelman says. "Identity politics in many ways wipes out the Old Left's commitment to solidarity, and the commitment to alleviate suffering, whatever form it takes. By saying that LD is a group identity issue, rather than a pedagogical and a policy issue, we create a queueing mentality. Everyone wants to trump, to make a plausible anti-discrimination claim, and jump to the front of the line. But there's no difference between learning-disabled and other kids strong enough to justify the other kids' facing resource deprivation."

No issue is more burdened by poorly quilted policy than LD—and, by extension, more in need of the discrimination (in its old-fashioned sense) that Kelman and Lester bring to it. Nonetheless, Kelman is not so sanguine on the fate of their project. "These things have a way of disappearing up into the ether," he sighs. It will be a shame if Kelman's prediction comes true. The beleaguered public school administrators—who complain of wildly skewed budget constraints, the specter of preposterous litigation, and children willfully malingering to land special perks—could really use a break. A Mississippi special educator, thwarted in her attempts to help struggling students who lack the learning-disabled diagnosis, confided to Lester: "Whether it's the Regular Ed teacher taking him into a group for a certain subject or whether it's Special Ed...I think that somehow, someday we're going to all have to say: *This is our kid.* What we need to do is educate this kid."

S.D. Metcalf is a writer living in New York.

DEDF HATCH

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continued from page 9

tifying how different economists propose compensating the "losers."

Peter Dorman is certainly correct that the Nader and Buchanan critiques of trade are very different. But there are surely points of commonality as well. How else to explain that each sides has been reaching out to the other on issues like GATT and NAFTA?

MAMA MIA!

Lawrence Osborne ["The Women Warriors," December/January] subverts what could have been an interesting article by rendering his subjects' positions extreme. Readers should be warned to watch out for certain hardening adjectives ("inexorable," "inevitable," "necessary") and adverbs ("purely," "irrevocably"). I never posited an "*inevitable* transition from prehistoric egalitarianism"; I never described "an *inexorable* progression from biological fact to symbol." I never talked about "arrangements which were originally *purely* functional"; Elizabeth Barber does not, as far as I know, describe "the division of labor and gender as 'an *inevitable* evil,'" nor did she say that "the communal...model...breaks down *irrevocably*." Finally, as far as I know, none of us referred to as proponents of the gradualist school has ever described patriarchy as a "*necessary* by-product" of some set of arrangements.

This may seem like academic nitpicking, but it is not. Osborne's prose not only polarizes people's positions but also produces substantive distortions in his analysis. For example, he presents a single gradualist model that "posits a slow and inevitable transition from prehistoric egalitarianism to male-dominated modernity." But there is no agreement whatsoever—and I certainly do not subscribe to the position—that there was a single prehistoric egalitarianism in the first place, not to mention a single male-dominated modernity. Indeed, even the idea that male dominance is universal has begun to unravel, as I discuss elsewhere in the article from which Osborne quotes.

To paraphrase Professor Conkey's comment at the end of the piece: Unfortunately Osborne's article illustrates that archaeology remains as much a springboard for popular culture and mythology as the other way around.

SHERRY B. ORTNER
PROFESSOR OF ANTHROPOLOGY
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Everyone from fascists to communists, misogynists to feminists, sexologists to folklorists to neopagans, seems to have found something in the myth of matriarchal prehistory that helps him or her make sense of the world. I thank Lawrence Osborne for bringing this exciting topic to the attention of *Lingua Franca* readers but must correct a factual error. Sir James Frazer of *Golden Bough* fame did not hint at "an ancient, female-dominated idyll." Instead, he stated unequivocally that "men create goddesses and women worship them." Though Frazer believed, with many of his peers, that early human societies were characterized by maternal kinship and goddess worship, he cautioned that "mother-kin does not mean mother-rule." Rather, he wrote, "the practice of mother-kin prevails most extensively among the lowest savages, with whom woman, instead of being the ruler of man, is always his drudge, and often little better than his slave."

CYNTHIA ELLER
CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF AMERICAN RELIGION, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

Lawrence Osborne responds: According to my notes, Sherry Ortner did indeed speak to me about "arrangements which were originally purely functional." The quotations from Elizabeth Barber are also presented verbatim.

As for my references to an "inevitable transition" and an "inexorable progression," they were offered as paraphrase. I do believe that they accurately portray the arguments made by Ortner and other "gradualists." These writers present the rise of patriarchy not as the result of haphazard contingencies, but of large-scale historical patterns.

Furthermore, though Ortner charges that I talk of "gradualism" and "male dominance" as if they were simple monoliths, the entire piece is an exploration of the bewildering diversity of such notions. To call this a descent into "popular mythology" is wide of the mark. It is merely that, for the sake of clarity and economy, one is obliged to summarize these varying positions: There is no harm in that.

WILLIAM DRENTTEL
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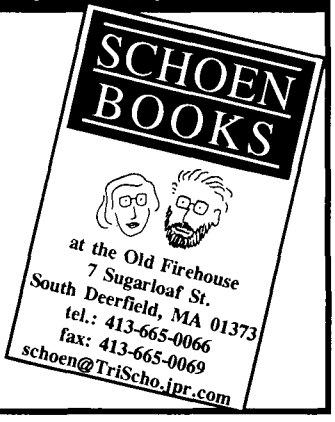

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This conference will explore the gendered effects of medical theories and practices, the gendering of bodies and diseases, political conflicts in reproductive health, and cultural constructions of health. Interdisciplinary panels will draw attention to ethical dimensions of these issues, interrelating perspectives from the present and the past. Nawal El Saadawi will deliver the keynote address. The conference will take place at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and is sponsored by the Institute for the Humanities, the Medical Humanities Program, and the Center for Research on Women and Gender. For further information or to register, contact Linda Vavra, Institute for the Humanities, 701 S. Morgan, MC 206, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL 60607-7040; phone (312) 996-6354; e-mail <lvavra@uic.edu>.

Chicago, IL; April 24-25, 1998

RIGHTS TO THE CITY

Global cities like Toronto, Vancouver, New York or Los Angeles have become sites of international flows of capital and labour, which have been widely discussed as an economic issue. "Rights to the City: Citizenship, Democracy and Cities in a Global Age," an international conference hosted by York University, will focus on the other side of the global city—the postcolonial city, with new patterns of gender, class and ethnic segregation. What rights do immigrants, the poor, and racial, ethnic, gender and youth groups have to the city and its institutions? What rights do citizens have in affecting the fate of their cities? Speakers include Benjamin Barber, Zygmunt Bauman, Nikolas Rose, Saskia Sassen, Richard Sennett, Edward Soja, Martin Thom, Bryan Turner, John Urry, Iris Marion Young, and Nira Yuval-Davis. Contact Engin Isin, Urban Studies Programme, York University, Toronto, ON M3J 1P3, Canada; <isin@yorku.ca>; or visit <http://www.yorku.ca/academics/isin/symposiu.htm>.

Toronto, ON, Canada; June 26-28, 1998

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Hypotheses

WHEEL OF FORTUNE

The hazards of driving sober

THERE ARE MANY TYPES OF people who might kill you. Jittery muggers, alienated postal workers, colleagues denied tenure, millenarian crackpots, merciful nurses—all pose a risk. But if you add up the probabilities that any of the five billion people in the world will put an end to your life, the sum is considerably less than the probability that you will kill yourself. In other words, you are a bigger homicidal threat to yourself than the rest of the world combined. (You could almost justify killing yourself in self-defense.)

Some other people who might kill you, however, are drunk drivers. They are an especially depraved category, many feel. "The most serious crime in America is not...rape or armed robbery," Alan Dershowitz has said, "it is drunk driving." The organization Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) vilifies those who drink and drive and has lobbied for minimum-sentencing rules in drunk-driving cases.

No one would deny that getting behind the wheel of the car while hog-whimperingly drunk is dangerous and something that ought to be deterred by criminal sanctions. But what about those who drive while only slightly intoxicated, barely over the legal limit? Do they deserve jail time, as is mandatory in some states even for first-time offenders? They are engaging in risky behavior, it's true, but all driving is risky: Sober drivers kill about twenty-five thousand Americans every year. Furthermore, some of these motorists could be taking public transportation but are too lazy; they would rather impose extra risk on themselves and fellow motorists. In fact, the difference in risk between driving drunk and driving sober is less than the difference between driving sober and taking mass transit.

Slightly squiffy drivers, those coming home from suburban cocktail parties and the like, may pose a somewhat higher hazard than the average sober motorist—assuming, that is, they do not try to compensate for their condition by driving extra carefully and staying well within the speed limit, as the sensible among them doubtless do. But how great is this incremental risk?

Take the typical driver with a blood alcohol concentration of 0.1 percent, the current threshold in most states. (MADD wants to lower it to 0.08 percent.) Such a motorist is between three and seven times more likely to cause an accident—a risk of the same order of magnitude as that posed by drivers who are distracted, sleepy, chatting on cell phones, or applying makeup, one would guess. In the case of elderly drivers, or nighttime drivers, or drivers of sports utility vehicles, the risk comparability with drunk driving can be demonstrated with hard statistics. Elderly drivers have an accident record ten times higher than forty-year-olds; nighttime driving is four times more likely to kill you than daylight driving; and in a fatal collision between a sports utility vehicle and an ordinary car, the driver of the latter is four times more likely to perish than the driver of the former. (Beware the geezer barreling down the road in a Range Rover at midnight.)

Then there are diabetic drivers with severe hypoglycemia, who are more than four times as likely to get in a crash as drunk drivers. Ban them from the road, you say? Then what about healthy eighteen-year-old males, whose accident rate is *forty times* worse than middle-aged women?

Clearly, there are many "impaired" drivers on the highways who do not fall under the dread DUI rubric. (Anyone for Mothers Against Distracted/Discretionary/Dormious/Diabetic/Dotard Drivers?) Yet they are punished only if they commit a tangible traffic violation—like crossing over the center line, say, or doing ninety under the Pont d'Alma. Drunk drivers are punished for the mere fact of their impairment—and punished severely.

The criminalization of drunk driving is less of a deterrent than one might expect. In those states that have passed laws mandating jail time for first-time DUI offenders, drunk-driving fatalities have declined by all of 2 percent. But the most compelling critique of drunk-driving laws comes from the Desert Theory of Punishment, which holds, plausibly enough, that an offender should be punished in proportion to the seriousness of the offense.

Douglas Husak, a Rutgers philosopher who also teaches in the law school there, made the case with impressive rigor a few years ago in the journal *Philosophy and Public Affairs.* The seriousness of a crime is a function of the harm it does and the culpability of the offender. But, as Husak observed, the gravity of the harms inflicted by drunk drivers is the same as those inflicted by sober drivers who cause an accident. Furthermore, singling out drunk driving on the grounds of riskiness doesn't work, since other kinds of conduct that create comparable risks—driving while sleepy or distracted, driving *tout court*—aren't offenses at all. As for culpability, even sober drivers should be aware of the grave dangers they pose, often for trivial reasons. (In Japan, it used to be considered a valid defense against charges of hazardous driving to argue that you were drunk at the time and therefore not responsible for your actions.)

"What I am really worried about is the overuse of criminal sanctions in this country," Husak told me. "People are always wringing their hands about the tremendous growth in America's prison population. As a philosopher, it seemed to me useful to try and identify where criminal sanctions might not be appropriate."

Husak is currently using the Desert Theory of Punishment to appraise U.S. drug laws. Meanwhile, those who are moved by his logic might consider joining the organization DAMM—Drunks Against Mad Mothers. Yes, it really exists.

JIM HOLT

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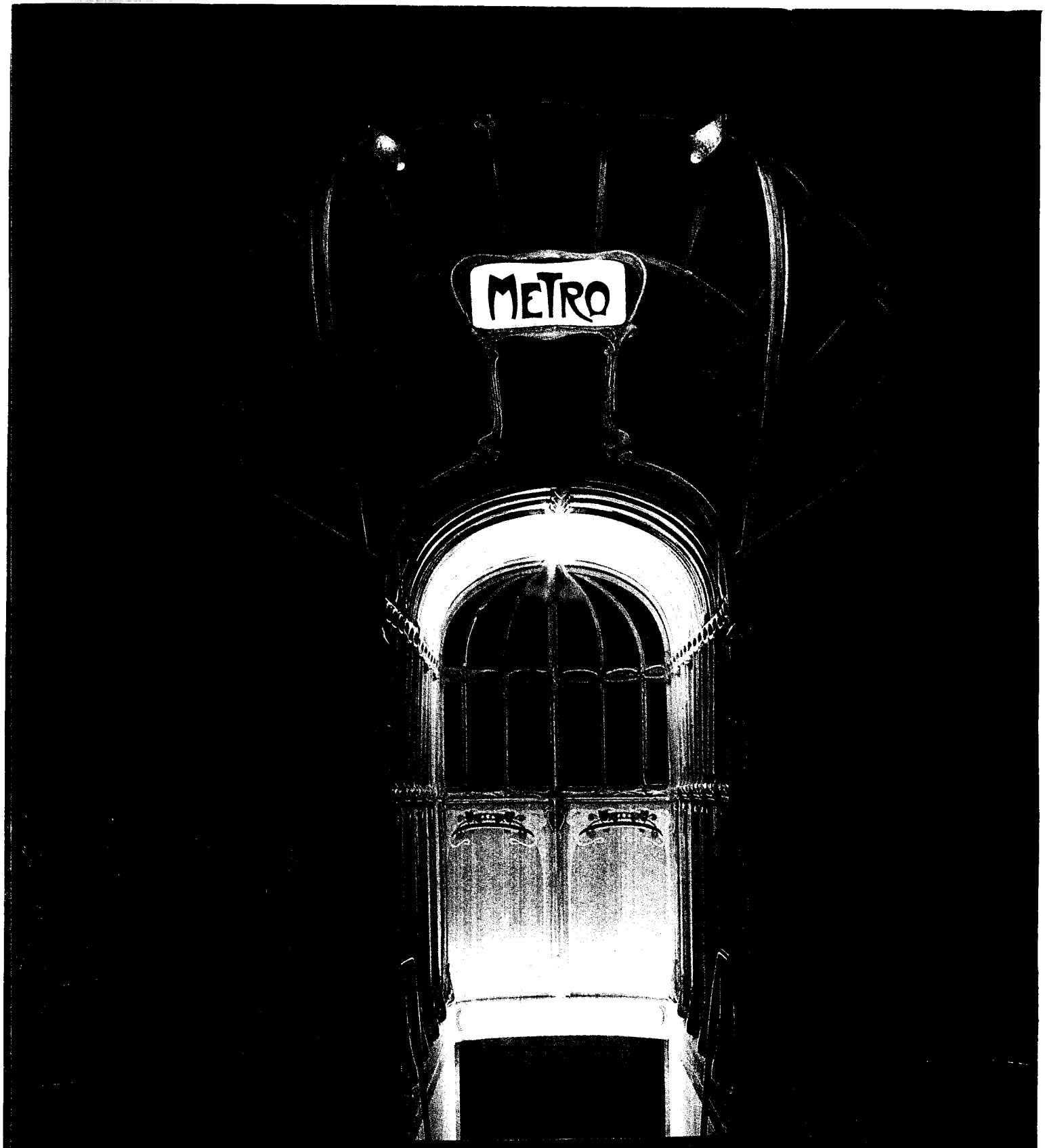

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